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Face to Face
Sociology looks at the art object:
The case of portraiture

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Phd Sociology
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2016

Declaration page

This is to certify that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Abstract

The thesis emerged from two streams. First, from an interest in portraiture. Both the portrait as an art object and portraiture as a social process are mediated by power relations, yet, despite this, it is a genre that has been relatively underexplored by sociology. Second, as a response to calls within the sociology of art for approaches that, rather than maintaining a distance, seek to take the artwork “seriously” as a source of “social knowledge that is of its own worth” (Harrington, 2004, p.3). Explorations of the ‘affordances’ that material objects provoke in socially situated subjects reflect this interest in capturing the ‘in-itself-ness’ of the art object in ways which are “congruent with social constructionism” (De la Fuente, 2007).

These two streams inform the thesis’ three aims, addressed through three case studies of five 20th Century portraits. First, to present portraiture and its relations of power to the sociological gaze. Second, to develop an empirical approach, characterised as ‘taking a line for a walk’, that seeks to keep in play: the material properties of the image and what these may afford to a situated viewer; to explore how these affordances operate to constitute the subjectivities of the individuals portrayed and the artists; and to consider how these processes play out in and through the processes of consecration of the object and artist within the cultural field. Third, to make a contribution to understanding how to capture sociologically the ‘in-itself-ness’ of the art object.

The thesis suggests the value of an approach that keeps in focus the art object and the context of its circulation, helping to deepen understanding of the operation of the field. Second, it reveals portraiture as an exercise of power, including in the constitution of the subjectivities represented in and through the portrait. Third, it suggests the continued difficulties of empirically capturing the ‘in-itself-ness’ of the art object.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr Nick Prior not just for his intellectual guidance and advice, but also for his unfailing patience throughout the thesis' lengthy gestation period. Without Nick's support it is unlikely I would have had the confidence to complete the study. My thanks also to Dr Steve Kemp for his always insightful comments and good humour.

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1. Introduction

1.1 The genesis of an idea

"Art...is bracketed in its own terms, as an expression of sensuousness and imaginative performance. Art forms establish a world for which meaningfulness is given, but the given is the occasion of considerable critical and interpretive analysis." (Blau, 2001, p.190)

"Sociology and art do not make good bedfellows." (Bourdieu, 1993 [1984], p.139)

The thesis is an exploration of the potential for a productive engagement between sociology and the art object. That is, an engagement that seeks to acknowledge art as "an expression of sensuousness and imaginative performance", with the capacity to generate knowledge and understanding "in its own terms" (Blau, 2001, p.190), but which also maintains an intellectual distance from, and critical stance toward, normative, or aesthetic judgement's about art (Harrington, 2004). In other words it explores the possibilities of a relationship between art and sociology, which, if not that of "good bedfellows", at least recognises the scope for mutuality and reciprocal understanding. This is examined through the prism of portraiture: a focus stemming from the 'pre-history' of the thesis. The following describes this 'genesis'. Section 1.2 sets out the aims of the thesis and section 1.3 summarises its structure.

The thesis started from an initial and long-standing personal interest in visual representations of madness. As I began reading the literature and looking at the visual images my own field of vision shifted from a specific concern with the images as vehicles for understanding the constitution of madness, to a broader interest in the images in and of themselves. An interest in them, that is, not only as visual objects in and through which subjectivities were constituted, but as 'artworks' created by an 'artist' and with potential trajectories through a field of cultural production – in other words, as 'portraits'.

What this shift in focus revealed was not only sociology's hitherto cursory glance in the direction of the portrait (notwithstanding its ubiquity, and that of representations of the face, in 'art', advertising, 'selfies', photograph albums, passports etc.), but also, more generally the discipline's ambiguous relationship to the individual art object. While the sociology of art has revealed much about the context of art production, distribution and consumption, and the relations of power that underwrite and sustain discourses of 'aesthetics', there has been a reluctance to engage with the art object as an "equal partner" (Harrington, 2004). This hesitancy stems in part from a concern not to cross into areas of knowledge outwith the discipline's purview, but also about breaching disciplinary principles of value distance – of being drawn into a discourse of aesthetic appraisal that the discipline seeks to critique.

Since at least the late 1970's, however, it has been argued that the sociology of art's reluctance to engage with the art object 'in itself', risks isolating the sub-discipline from the very object of its enquiry (Becker et al, 2006; Bird, 1979; Harrington, 2004; Stewart, 2014; Wolff, 2008; Zolberg, 1997). As part of a wider shift toward consideration of the material world through, for example, cultural studies, cultural sociology/sociology of culture (Eyerman, 2006; Inglis et al, 2007; Stewart, 2014), and theoretical developments such as Actor Network Theory (Latour, 2005), there have been calls for a 'new sociology of art', one that puts 'art' back into social sciences but in a way which is "congruent with social constructionism and which avoids unnecessary 'essentializing' of what we mean by art" (De la Fuente 2007, p.418). This, however, begs the question what would such an approach look like?

It was from these two streams that the thesis emerged; a curiosity about portraiture, and a puzzlement about how to empirically address individual artworks in a way that mediates between the object's own affordances (Gibson, 1986 [1979]) and a critical analysis of the social practices and institutions of art production, distribution and consumption.

1.2 The aims of the thesis

The thesis had three broad and overlapping aims. First, to bring portraiture to sociological consciousness. Both the portrait as object and portraiture as a social process are mediated by power relations. Power plays out in terms of who (and who is not) portrayed, how and by whom; in the relationship between artist/'sitter'; and between subject/object of the work and a situated viewer. As an 'art' object power is manifest in the 'struggle' by artist and object for recognition within a field of cultural production (Bourdieu, 2004; Rubio and Silvo, 2013). Yet, in a context in which, as Inglis (2005a) argues, "the sociological view tends to see 'art' as always thoroughly bound up with *politics*" (p.12, emphasis in original) such a "politically invested genre" (van Alphen, 1997), has been relatively underexplored. Presenting portraiture to the sociological gaze is therefore productive for what it reveals of these operations of power, within and through 'art' objects. In particular, as a representational genre, with a focus on the human face, an analysis of portraiture illustrates how the properties of images, and the evaluative processes of the object as artwork, can contribute to the constitution of the subjectivities of both the subject of the work and of the 'artist'-producer.

Second, analytical frameworks have been developed which seek to mediate between the 'social and the aesthetic' (see, for example, Born, 2010; Griswold, 1987). In the sociology of music, for example, commentators such as Born (2005), deNora (2003; 2004), Darmon (2015) and Hennion (2003; 2007) draw on the concept of mediation to describe a process of 'co-production' emergent from the 'intermingling' (Born, 2005) of the materiality or "matter" of cultural objects and socially situated subjects. There is, however, little comparable work focusing on the individual visual art object – painting or photography – or which examines the specific generative potential of portraiture. The thesis seeks to contribute to filling this 'gap' by developing an empirical approach that, firstly, engages with and retains a focus on the material qualities of individual portraits and what these properties afford or provoke in situated viewers. Given the focus on portraiture of particular interest is how these properties work to 'co-produce' or constitute the subjectivities of those who are represented in and through the images.

Secondly, it seeks to examine the social and historical operation of the field in which these visual images are constituted (or perhaps “consecrated”) as ‘artworks’. In effect the aim was to explore the potentialities of an approach that seeks to both work outward, centrifugally from the art object to the wider social context, and centripetally from the wider context back to the object. It meant engaging with the image, the subject(s) constituted in and through the images and the circulation of the image in the field.

In the course of the analysis the third aim of the thesis was to make a contribution to understanding how to capture sociologically both the ‘in itself-ness’ of the art object and the (“politically invested”) social production of meaning and value.

To meet these aims the thesis draws on a broad range of theoretical literature. Theoretically, it is underpinned by an understanding of the field of cultural production (Bourdieu, 2004, 2005 [1992]). But to attempt to articulate and describe the ‘affordance’ or ‘supplement’, the “source of existential knowledge that is of its own worth” (Harrington, 2004, p.3) implied in the notion of ‘in-itselfness’ it draws on a number of ‘conceptual frames’. In chapter 5 Barthes’ concept of the ‘punctum’ is drawn upon to describe the “pricking” an image may generate in a (situated) viewer, in chapter 6 the sense of the ‘abject’ (Kristeva, 1982) is used as another way of attempting to pin down the ‘something’ provoked or afforded, and the notion of aura (or its absence) (Benjamin, 1999 [1936]) is used as the basis for the case study image in chapter 7.

1.3 The structure of the thesis

The structure of the thesis is as follows. The next substantive chapter provides an overview of sociology’s engagement with art and the artwork, including the intellectual shifts over time and within different theoretical paradigms. This includes institutional approaches to ‘art’, as well as approaches which have sought to analyse individual art objects to inform or illustrate wider social processes. This provides the context against which calls for a ‘new’ sociology of art are to be understood.

Chapter three presents the parallel evolution of portraiture. This chapter describes the genre's historical development, purpose, production and distribution processes, including the power relations underpinning the portrait's 'transaction'. It also maps out some of the paradoxes surrounding what a 'portrait' is, what it seeks to capture, and its ambiguous position between 'art' and 'document'. The portrait thus offers itself up as a fruitful medium through which to develop an approach that seeks to mediate between the art object and its social context.

Chapter 4 describes the approach developed. At the core of this is an iterative method characterised as 'taking a line for a walk'. A different conceptual frame is used to help structure each case study. Within the frames the focus begins on the properties of the case study portraits, before widening out to consider the evaluative 'talk' about the images followed by a consideration of the institutional and organisational infrastructure within which the images circulate.

In the process it draws on an extensive body of material both from outwith the discipline and from outwith academe. This includes art historical literature, but also newspaper articles, internet 'blogs', artist's websites and, in chapter 7, commentaries produced by music journalists. This material is used both as a 'resource', a source of information, but also as the 'topic' of enquiry, analysed critically for what it illustrates of the operation of the 'field' and processes of consecration. As such this chapter therefore raises questions about the differential power relations at play in the evaluative process as well as drawing attention to some of the tensions between seeking social scientific 'methodological rigour', and the 'aesthetic' and subjective judgements being made at every stage.

Chapters 5 – 7 comprise the three case studies. Around the conceptual frames of the 'death of the artist' (Foucault, 1991a [1969]), and the "punctum" (Barthes, 2000 [1980]), two photographic self-portraits by Francesca Woodman are analysed in chapter 5. The 'line' this chapter takes reveals the complex interplay between the material properties of the artworks and the

subjectivity, sought from, and read into the works. It also illustrates the unfolding process of consecration of the works and the artist, revealing the power of key players, networks and institutions within the field.

The 'Abject Portrait' is discussed in chapter 6. Based on analyses of a self-portrait by the artists Gilbert and George, and a photographic portrait of the twins Dresie and Casie, by Roger Ballen, this chapter demonstrates the ways in which even the most abject materials can effectively be absorbed by and gain value within the 'field'. But the analysis also suggest the potential 'flip flop' between an evaluation of the image as artwork and evaluation of the subjects of the image; a 'flip flop' informed by the 'aesthetic' qualities of the image. This case opens on to a consideration of how the power of the field to confer 'recognition' on the artist can parallel misrecognition of the subjects of the art.

In chapter 7 the 'aura' and 'authenticity' of the portrait (and portrayed) in the 'age' of digital production, distribution, (re-production) and consumption is explored through a 'group portrait' of the four members of the band Blur by Julian Opie. An 'art' object intended for 'mass' consumption as a CD/record cover and promotional material, what the analysis reveals is the work's ambiguities and ambiguous position. As a record-cover the cartoon-like style of the digitally produced image itself leaves little scope for interpretation of meaning, but as a series of portraits the limited clues as to the 'essence' of the people portrayed potentially opens it up to the investment of a "beholder's share" (Gombrich, 1980). As an image produced by an 'artist' for a commercial commodity claims and counterclaims are made for the authority and authenticity of the image as an *artwork*. As an image of a 1990's pop group, parallel claims and counterclaims are also made for the 'authenticity' of the subjects of the image.

The final chapter presents some tentative conclusions. First, it is suggested that the case studies illustrate the value of an approach that includes an analysis of the material object in helping to ground and deepen understanding of the operation of the field. In effect it becomes a process

with an object. Second, the specific focus on portraiture reveals the operations of power: at the micro level of the production and reception of individual works, and in the constitution of the subjectivities of those who are portrayed in and through the portraits; and at the macro level of the object's circulation through the field. But, third, what the attempt also points to is the continued evasiveness or elusiveness of the 'in-itself-ness' of the material object, insofar as this can be said to exist and can be articulated. What constantly resurfaces is the situated account of the viewer or the evaluative interpretations driven by actors who are themselves embedded within the field.

The thesis thus demonstrates the mutual productivity of an approach that keeps in focus both the artwork and the context of production, distribution and reception. While some methodological questions and dilemmas have still to be resolved, and particularly the continued fugitive nature of the 'in-itself-ness' it argues that there is a value to and need for embedding the artwork within the sociology of art.

2. Sociology and art: an object lesson

2.1 Introduction

"Painting is what it is. When its really good, it makes your eyes widen, your breath deeper. You know you're standing in front of something incredibly important about your existence but you don't know why...It's the instinctive nature of a visual encounter." (Saville in Schama, 2005, p.128)

"The task of social-theoretic thinking...is to seek ways of generating intersubjectively defensible conceptions of the relation of value-distanciating sociological analysis to value-affirming aesthetic appraisal and value-affirming social and political philosophy and practice." (Harrington, 2004, p.210)

In an introductory text, Inglis (2005a) suggests that the sociological study of art is primarily concerned with the relations between 'art' and 'society', that is in the ways in which "social relations and institutions impact upon the creation, distribution and appreciation of art works" (p.19). This sociological engagement with the 'context', particularly the socially and historically contingent nature of 'art', the 'artist', and the constitution of the 'art worlds' has revealed much about the social processes of cultural production and consumption and particularly the power relations at play within these processes and practices. Nonetheless, the discipline has been reluctant to engage with the art or cultural object *qua* object, to treat art as an 'equal partner', both as "a source of existential social knowledge that is of its own worth" (Harrington, 2004, p.3), and as a "dynamic medium in relation to historical process and to cultural and political change" (deNora, 2004 p.213). In particular sociology has tended to shy away from consideration of the object as the locus of intersubjectively meaningful 'aesthetic' experience and evaluative judgements. That is, to understand art objects not *wholly* as illustrative of the relations of power that underpin discourses of aesthetics, but also to consider sociologically the power *of* the art object as generative of sensuous experience, the feeling, as Saville (in Schama, 2005) suggests of "*standing in front of something incredibly important about your existence but you don't know why*".

In part this avoidance has been based on concerns with disciplinary principles of value distance, and also the limits to disciplinary 'expertise' to make or presume to make judgements about the quality of the object (Harrington 2004; Prior 2004; Witkin 1997). But this reluctance to engage directly with the object, to take artworks 'seriously', also, more fundamentally, reflects a critique and rejection of 'humanist' and 'universalist' assessments of value and meaning. As Brand and Korsmeyer (1995) note, the two presumptions that art's value transcends cultural differences and that the appreciation and constitution of "beauty, sublimity and artistic greatness" are universal qualities, have been challenged both by postmodernists and feminists. The feminist critique coalesces into the argument that:

"The universal subject is historically situated (masculine, patriarchal, imperialistic); and that the concept of fine or high art along with the notion of artistic genius, is exclusionary both historically and conceptually." (Brand and Korsmeyer, 1995, p.8)

Others have similarly drawn attention to the exclusionary force of an institutional framework that is not only gendered, but also classed and raced (Bourdieu, 2007 [1979]; Corse and Griffin, 1997; hooks, 1995; Murray and Murray, 2006).

For some commentators, however, this reluctance to engage with the art object, in and of itself, and as a (shared) source of value and meaning, is an 'abdication' of responsibility for what is a legitimate area of concern for a sociology of art (Harrington, 2004; Zolberg, 1997) and, to use Zolberg's term,

¹ The name for the 'sub-discipline' delineating the boundaries of a sociological consideration of art as institution, process, discourse, object, is itself contested, in terms, for example, of whether it is 'a' sociology or references a plurality of approaches (Harrington, 2004), and, similarly, whether it should refer to 'art' in the singular or 'arts' in the plural to reflect the range of different 'art' forms (Harrington, 2004). De la Fuente (2007), deNora (2004) and Harrington (2004) also argue against the use of the genitive *of*, as in the sociology *of* art or music, on the grounds that it separates out the art and society, and risks giving the social dominion over the art, rather than acknowledging their mutual constitution and their joint "cognition of the world" (Harrington, 2004). A further distinction is between the use of the terms 'art', 'artists' and 'artworks' as opposed to the ostensibly more neutral terms of 'cultural' forms, products, objects and producers (Inglis, 2005a). For current purposes a pragmatic approach will be adopted, but one that serves the specific aims of the thesis to re-centre the object contingently constituted as an art object, while fully recognising the social

‘insulates’ the sub-discipline from the very object of its enquiry. In the context of a post-critical ‘return to value’, one which seeks to “establish a new discourse of value without a foundation in certainties or universals” (Wolff, 2008, p.5), and which recognises inequalities in access to the processes of value affirmation, what these commentators argue for is a synthesis, an approach which “seeks to reconstruct the best insights of metaphysical conceptions concerning value and meaning in art” (Harrington, 2004, p.31) with sociological understanding and critique.

To develop, as Harrington (2004, epigraph 2 above) suggests, a model of analysis in which “value-distanciating” sociological analysis is able to mediate between value-affirming aesthetic appraisal and social and political practice poses a number of questions. First, how to develop a method that engages with, and retains a balance between, the material qualities of the visual art object and its own affordances, *and* critical analysis of the social practices and institutions of art production, distribution and consumption? Second, whether and how to resolve the “antinomy” (Harrington, 2004) between ‘essentialist’ or ‘metaphysical’ and ‘social constructionist’ approaches to meaning and value. Finally, what are the implications for sociology as a discipline? While potentially contributing to sociological understanding (literally) beyond the picture plane, how can a sociology of art which seeks to take the object ‘seriously’, draw on and contribute insights from other disciplines, while, on the one hand, retaining its own intellectual ‘specificity’, and, on the other avoiding ‘sociological imperialism’ (Crowther, 1994; Inglis, 2005b)?

Before attempting in the following chapters to begin to explore these questions, it is necessary to first step back and briefly map out sociology’s engagement with ‘art’: how the object of study has been defined³; the

and historical basis of that contingency. By the same token this will be located within ‘a sociology of art’, again to underline the focus of the study, and its specific concern with the visual art object. Where however, other commentators define the sub-discipline in other ways this will be reflected in the text.

³ Because the focus of this thesis is on visual images, and particularly images which have a concrete physical material existence (even if, as discussed in chapter 7, this concrete existence can be reproduced and reconstituted in different media and formats), the term

lineaments of a specifically sociological engagement over (and within time); and what distinguishes (or not) this engagement from that of other disciplines or approaches. Second, to home in on the implications for sociology's relationship to the individual art object or cultural product, and particularly the thorny issue of a properly sociological account of the experience and evaluation of the object i.e. its aesthetic properties. Following on from this to consider arguments for a 'synthesis' or an in-between-ness, that is, a sociology of art which treats works of art in a way that:

"(1) Takes seriously the possibility of their intrinsic aesthetic value, while (2) recognising political values of democracy of access to cultural production and cultural valuation, but at the same time (3) seeks to gain a scientific distance from both aesthetic and political valuation by insisting on an intellectual ethics of clear distinction between empirical modes of discourse...and normative modes of discourse." (Harrington, 2004, p.5)

2.2 Sociologies of art: framing the discipline

2.2.1 The sociological field of vision

"The sociology of art is the study of the practices and institutions of artistic production...it also discloses the ways in which these practices are embedded in and informed by broader social and political processes and institutions, with economic forces historically playing a particularly important role." (Wolff, 1981, p.139)

"Sociology poses the question: in what ways do social relations and institutions impact upon the creation, distribution and appreciation of artworks." (Inglis, 2005a, p.19)

Although written 20-years apart, for both Wolff (1981) and Inglis (2005a) what frames (and legitimises) sociology's engagement with 'art' is that, as a concept, a practice, an object, and an institution it is a social product, and therefore bound up "with processes of struggle and conflict between different social groups" (Inglis, 2005a, p.14). Sociological approaches thus "avoid[...] attempting to define art in terms of norms and essences of beauty valid for all time and all societies" (Harrington, 2004 p.15), but rather seek to draw attention to both the social processes by and through which objects

'object' as used here may not be generalizable to other less physically static or fixed art products such as music, theatre, or even performance art (unless photographed and filmed).

come to be defined, experienced and evaluated as 'art', and the underpinning relations of power, including the political processes which would seek to 'naturalize' and 'universalise' these mechanisms.

The sociological field of vision³ therefore encompasses the institutional frameworks and social processes by and through which 'art' is produced (concretely and discursively), distributed, received, consumed, experienced and judged. This includes the processes and practices through which individual objects (material, concrete, virtual or conceptual) are produced; the constituting and constituted role of the producer/'artist', and the similarly constituted and constituting role of the spectator/viewer/consumer; the market for and marketing of 'symbolic goods' (Bourdieu, 2004); and the socially constructed grounds for experiencing and evaluating these goods. Given this breadth no attempt is made here to provide a comprehensive overview of the different theoretical approaches and foci adopted by sociologists of the arts – whether in the form of social theories of art or sociology(ies) of the arts (for more detailed analyses see, for example, Alexander, 2003; Chaplin, 1994; Harrington, 2004; Heywood, 1997; Inglis, 2005a; Tanner, 2003; Wolff, 1981; Zolberg, 1997). Rather, the aim here will be to identify some of the key themes, particularly as they set in context some of questions around which the thesis is developed and, in particular, point up sociology's "blind spot" (Becker et al, 2006), the art object.

Wolff (1981) begins her analysis of approaches to the *Social Production of Art* with a discussion of the relationship between 'social structure and artistic creativity'. Wolff's starting point is that:

"All action, including creative action...arises in the complex conjunction of numerous structural determinants and conditions...Any concept of 'creativity' which denies this is metaphysical...But the corollary...is not that human agents are simply programmed robots, or that we need not take account of their biographical, existential or motivational aspects...practical

³ In relation to music, Martin (2006) too argues for a specifically sociological 'gaze', one that "generates a rather different discourse to that of musicology" (p.21).

⁴ A period variously defined as starting and ending somewhere between 1400 – 1800 (see, for

activity and creativity are in a mutual relation of interdependence with social structures.” (Wolff, 1981, p.9)

Her subsequent discussion on the relationship between structure and (artistic) agency in a number of respects mirrors the different within-disciplinary emphases. These can very crudely be distinguished between those sociological approaches which theorise ‘art’ (as institution, practice, object, discourse or experience) as in ways ‘reflective’ of wider social processes, i.e. as an expression of social structure, and those which see ‘art’ as in some ways ‘relatively’ (if not absolutely) autonomous, including the potential for art to have a constitutive or ‘shaping’ capacity on society (Alexander, 2003). As will be discussed below, this has particular salience at the level of the art object and what might be called the “sociology versus aesthetics” debate where the distinction is between ‘internalist’ approaches, focusing on form, technique, media, content and “aesthetic influences”, and ‘externalist’ accounts of the ‘extra-aesthetic’ relationships between, artist, art work and social structures (Zolberg, 1997). The following very briefly sketches out approaches to the field of cultural production, and the accounts of the social processes by which producers and works are constituted (consecrated) as artists and as artworks respectively. Without wishing to create an artificial divide (and pre-empt a main focus of the study), for clarity, specific consideration of sociological approaches to the individual art object will be discussed in section 2.3 below.

2.2.2 Disciplinary development

The development of what Tanner (2003) describes as “the concept of art as an autonomous cultural domain” (p.4) is associated with the structural differentiation that marks the emergence of modernity. Historically, in Western societies within the medieval (‘pre-modern’) social structure, artistic labour was largely a collective process based on guild workshops. It was a form of cultural production bound up with the creation of artefacts not produced in and of themselves, but for other, often religious, purposes.

From the Early Modern period⁴ and its associated humanist philosophies, 'art' emerges as a distinct sphere, embodied in the concept of the individual artist (potentially endowed with 'genius'), creating and producing works whose value shifts from 'cult' value, in the service of religion, to 'exhibition' value for public consumption, largely divorced from a religious function (Benjamin, 1999a [1936]).

This process of structural differentiation accelerates in the 18th and 19th Centuries with the development of, on the one hand, aesthetic philosophy which provides a discourse for articulating the experience and evaluation of art (Shusterman, 2006; Tanner, 2003), and on the other, the changing institutional context. This includes: the declining patronage system and increase in the commercial art market and dealership system; the development of the academy system for training new artists (White and White, 1993 [1965]) and of museums and galleries for the display and sale of art work; changing technologies for (re) producing art e.g. the introduction of new pigments, printing and engraving techniques, and photography (Becker, 1984; Fyfe, 1988; Wolff, 1981); and an expanded middle class audience for 'art' (Bourdieu, 2007 [1979]; DiMaggio, 1986).

These developments perpetuate the differentiated field, but are not specific to the field. As Inglis (2005a) notes, although 'art' has a history of its own, "that history is connected to and bound up with, the histories of other social institutions" (p.23). In other words, as Bourdieu (2004) has argued, the field of cultural production is relatively autonomous from, but connected to other social fields, specifically the field of power by which it is dominated, and the economic field, in which the field of large scale (mass) production of 'popular' culture is immured, but which the restricted field of 'high culture' seeks to disavow. Further, as will be discussed below, the very process of 'autonomization', of claims for art as 'devoid of any determinants', and an 'art for art's sake', is part of its social construction (Bourdieu, (2004; 2005 [1992])).

⁴ A period variously defined as starting and ending somewhere between 1400 – 1800 (see, for example Dewald (2004)).

The degree to which art worlds and art works *reflect* wider social processes, or, as in Bourdieu's account, *refract* these processes, plays out in analyses of the art-society interface over and within time. Vico, the early 18th Century Italian writer, for example, saw the art of a society as expressive of its soul (Inglis, 2005a). In France, Montesquieu, writing in the mid-18th Century, reflected on the changing aesthetic customs in the context of the rise and fall of the Roman state (Tanner, 2003). In the early 19th Century the German philosopher Herder argued that art should not be judged by a single standard, but understood in the context of its own period (Inglis, 2005a; Tanner, 2003). Building on Herder's analysis, Hegel argued that art works were the vehicle for the expression of the highest values, the 'spirit' (*zeitgeist*) of a given culture (Inglis, 2005a; Tanner, 2003).⁵ Both Inglis and Tanner argue that it is the Hegelian vision, and the need to see art within its own time, which informed the subsequent development of both art history (such as in the work of Wölfflin, Panofsky, Hauser) and the sociology of art.

Marxist analyses of the relationship between art and society aimed to expose the ideological nature of art and of art criticism (Wolff, 1981). Within this context art works are seen as the product of, and reflecting the material conditions of a society at a specific historical period (Inglis, 2005a; Wolff, 1981). This draws on Marx's analysis that "the mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life." (Marx, (1993 [1859], p.2), that is, that the economic base of a society, shapes the socio-cultural 'superstructure'. Further, for Marx "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force." (Marx, 1976 [1845/6]), *emphases in original*), thus enabling the dominant groups to naturalise the nature of the power they hold and represent it as in the interests of all groups (Inglis, 2005a). Artworks are thus viewed as ideological to the extent that they are seen as representing these dominant ideologies (see for example, Berger, 1972; Hadjinicolaou, 1978).

⁵ However, as Harrington (2004) notes, for Hegel art's moment has been, having been taken up into two higher forms of absolute spirit: religion and philosophy.

This approach has, however, been criticised as reductionist, insofar as it implies that artworks are (merely or largely) channels for, or reflective of, dominant ideologies and lack their own ‘specificities and subtleties’ (Inglis, 2005a, p.22). More sophisticated (but still materialist) analyses have argued for art’s *relative* autonomy, that is, an ‘art world’ and artworks that may be mediated by, or indirectly expressive of, socio-economic conditions, but not wholly or directly. Lukács, for example argued that each part of a society should be seen as part of the whole of that society, or ‘social totality’ (Lukács 1971 [1923], in Inglis, 2005a; Tanner, 2003). This ‘totality’ shapes the nature of the constituent parts. Rather than being *directly* shaped by the socio-economic base, culture is indirectly affected by and affects other constituent parts in a series of *mediations*.

Picking up this thread, the theorists of the Frankfurt school or institute (including Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, and, less directly, Walter Benjamin), focused on the mediating role of culture between the individual and wider society (Dant, 2003). For Adorno and Horkheimer, just as manufacturing industry generates things as products, so in advanced capitalist societies, the culture industry generates *ideas* as products (Adorno, 1991; Dant, 2003). In his aesthetic theory⁶, Adorno (2008 [1970]) argues that, with the coming of capitalism, artworks which previously had performed a religious function, become marketable commodities, acquiring for the bourgeois value as objects of contemplation. Aesthetics as a discipline emerges to establish and legitimate this value. The ‘fetishistic’ status of the artwork – that is its value over and above its use value, gives it a dual essence: being both ‘autonomous’ and a commodity. For Adorno high art (primarily modernist art and music of the 19th and early 20th centuries) should preserve its autonomy from ‘life’, not in the sense of an ‘art for art’s sake’, but in the sense of “a fore-intimation of the possibility of real autonomy in social relations” (Harrington, 2004, p.166). Insofar as an artwork strains toward autonomy, toward independence from society, it can constitute a

⁶ This summary of Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* draws extensively on Chaplin (1994) and Harrington (2004).

critique of that society. This degree of autonomy is achieved not at the level of content, but is embodied in the work's form:

"The unsolved antagonisms of reality return in artworks as immanent problems of form. This, not the insertion of objective elements, defines the relation of art to society." (Adorno, 2008 [1970]), p.7)

It also implies, for Adorno, that in the struggle to attain the work's autonomy, the artist must transform artistic material such that it becomes unintelligible to the 'masses', and thus becomes resistant to the pull of exchange value (Chaplin, 1994).

Although, as Chaplin (1994), Dant (2003) and Harrington (2004) note, Adorno and Horkheimer's work exposes the "generalising tendency" of monopoly capitalism, as well as offering, in the example of the 'high artist' struggling to achieve an autonomous work, a model for 'consciousness raised' individuals living under the threat of totalisation (Chaplin, 1994), their distancing of art from popular culture and from the 'masses' has exposed their analyses to criticism. In particular, their work has been criticised for its ostensible privileging of high art (Chaplin, for example, describes Adorno's work as "an elitist aesthetic theory" (1994, p.36)), for its lack of discrimination of different forms of cultural products, or for differences within forms (such as within jazz music), and for its "idiosyncratic value judgements" (Harrington, 2004). It has also been suggested that they "underestimated audiences' capacities for reflexive self-distanciation" (Harrington, 2004, p.171) and failed to recognise that a cultural artefact could be both art *and* entertainment (Dant, 2003).

As noted earlier, the emergence of a separate social institution or sphere of specifically 'artistic' production has been linked to the historical process of differentiation and specialisation characteristic of modernity. Although beginning prior to the 19th Century (Tanner, 2003), it has been argued that this process accelerated from the mid-19th Century (Inglis, 2005a; Luhmann,

2000; Schinkel, 2010).⁷ In his account of the genesis and structure of both an ‘autonomous’ field of cultural production and reception or consumption, Bourdieu seeks to expose how the field both legitimizes and naturalizes bourgeois domination (Bourdieu, 2004; 2005 [1992]). No attempt is made here to present a detailed account or critique of Bourdieu’s analyses (see, for example, Boschetti, 2006; Bottero and Crossley, 2011; Crowther, 1994; Dunn, 1998; Fowler, 1994; Prior, 2005; Robbins, 2006). The aim rather is to set out some of the components of Bourdieu’s analyses, identifying those that have particular salience for the current context.

Seeking an alternative to both subjectivist and objectivist accounts, Bourdieu developed a relational model to understand the operation and structure of the field of cultural production. For Bourdieu, the ‘field’ is a social space “structurally homologous” to other fields but functioning independently according to its own internal logic. The influence of other fields is indirect – ‘refracted’ rather than reflected. In relation to the field of cultural production, Bourdieu describes a model in which the field is located within and “dominated” by the field of power. However, in terms of its internal ‘hierarchization’ of products and producers, the field is relatively autonomous, split, internally, between the field of restricted production (the field of high art, or “production for producers”), and the field of large-scale production (Bourdieu, 2004). This hierarchization ‘reverses’ the operation of the economic world: with greater symbolic capital accruing to those works and producers in the sub-field of restricted production, accompanied by an ostensible disavowal of economic interest. The restricted field is supported by the social apparatus of museums, galleries and the academic and educational systems. By comparison, the sub-field of large-scale production, supported and sustained by the commercial sector, follows an economic model and targets a ‘mass’ or popular audience.

The structure of the field of restricted production is dynamically shaped by positions and position-takings as producers and products (Rubio and Silva,

⁷ As Tanner (2003) notes, the same processes influenced the emergence (and separation) of sociology and art history as disciplines.

2013) struggle for recognition, consecration, or prestige, the symbolic capital of the field. For Bourdieu, the 'authority' to consecrate is not vested in individuals or institutions but,

"...The field of production, understood as the system of objective relations between these agents or institutions and as the site of the struggles for the monopoly of the power to consecrate, in which the value of works of art and belief in that value are continuously generated." (Bourdieu, 2004, p.78)

What mediates the position-taking strategies of agents in the field is their 'habitus', or their 'feel for the game', defined by Bourdieu as "a durable, transposable structure of dispositions...which generate and organize practices and representations" (Bourdieu, 1990a [1980], p.53, cited in Johnson, 2004, p.5). The habitus is acquired and internalized through socialisation. It is, for Bourdieu, the mechanism by which external, objective social structures are reproduced and subsequently shape individual action (Dunn, 1998). Within the field of cultural production, agents' (unconscious) position-taking is structured by their individual habitus, their initiation into the practices and institutions of the field – what Grenfell and Hardy (2003) call the "group habitus" - and their belief or interest in the game and its stakes, the *illusio* (Bourdieu, 2005 [1992]). As summarised by Lane:

"Stylistic choices and aesthetic innovations can only be explained by taking into account the historically determined range of possible positions on offer to any artist and not by reference to 'external' factors such as social origin alone. Social origins may have a role...but only inasmuch as, incorporated into the structured dispositions of the habitus, they are mediated or 'refracted' through, 'retranslated' into the logic of the artistic field at a particular historical moment." (Lane, 2005, p.38)

In attempting to account for the 'genesis' of an 'autonomous' field of cultural production, Bourdieu describes two parallel movements. On the one hand is the emergence of producers motivated by a 'pure' artistic intent, or 'pure gaze', independent of economic or political demands: an art which privileges form over function. Bourdieu describes the emergence of this 'pure gaze' through his analyses of the work of the mid 19th Century French artists and authors Flaubert, Manet and Baudelaire. Their social backgrounds, internalized in their habitus, predisposed them to take up

certain positions within the artistic field (also made feasible because of their relative material advantages). From these positions they rejected both the bourgeois art of the academy and politically engaged art, and created new positions for themselves in the newly created field of restricted production, producing 'disinterested' art. The formalist emphasis of the 'pure gaze' has subsequently become the basis of both the autonomy and legitimation of the field. It is the grounds for the acquisition of symbolic capital on the part of the producers, even at the expense of economic capital:

"...The affirmation of the primacy of form over function, of the mode of representation over the object of representation, is the most specific of the field's claims to produce and impose the principles of a properly cultural legitimacy regarding both the production and the reception of the art work." (Bourdieu, 2004, p.117)

As this implies, the other side of the equation is the emergence of an 'aesthetic disposition' among consumers. That is, a way of perceiving art that enables consumers to decode works according to the values of the artistic field, to adopt, a similarly 'disinterested' disposition. This capacity or competence is neither natural nor universal, but a form of cultural capital acquired through an unequally distributed process of cultural transmission, which serves to legitimate and perpetuate that inequality. As Bourdieu argues in his analysis of 'taste':

"The denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile – in a word, natural, enjoyment, which constitutes the sacred sphere of culture, implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished pleasures forever closed to the profane. That is why art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences." (Bourdieu, 2007 [1979], p.7)

For Bourdieu, the field of cultural production, as internally structured, and in its dominated position in the field of power, serves to legitimate, naturalize and reproduce bourgeois domination. In contradistinction to this 'conflict' model Howard Becker's (1984) analysis of 'art worlds' is not concerned to examine how this world may function to perpetuate inequality, but how the

model of co-operative collective effort required to produce artworks, which he identifies within this world, can be used as a framework for the sociological investigation of “collective actions and the events they produce” (Chaplin, 1994, p.169).

Becker’s analysis draws on the institutional theories of art of analytical philosophy (Harrington, 2004), specifically the work of Danto (1964) and Dickie (1975). For these theorists what distinguishes art from non-art is the decision by the social institution, the art world, to confer status on these works (Harrington, 2004). That is, only the institution (and those within the institution, such as artists, critics, agents etc.) have the authority to, in Bourdieu’s terms, ‘consecrate’ an object as ‘art’, whether it is a men’s china urinal in the case of Duchamp’s *fountain*, first exhibited in 1917, or Andy Warhol’s multiple plywood replicas of Brillo boxes (1964). For Becker, sociological analysis is only concerned to observe which members of the art world are treated as capable of ‘conferring status’.

Distinguishing between the concepts of the ‘world’ and the ‘field’, Becker (Becker and Pessin, 2006) argues that the latter describes the arrangements for making art as if they were a field of forces in physics – “caricatures”, rather than “real flesh and blood people” whose relations are primarily those of domination, based on competition and conflict (p.277). The concept of ‘world’ (which Becker argues is more empirically grounded than that of the ‘field’), “contains people, all sorts of people, who are in the middle of doing something which requires then to pay attention to each other” (Becker and Pessin, 2006, p.277 – 278) – it focuses on the collective activity of all those who contribute to the activity. Summarising the different questions each concept poses Becker argues that:

“The basic question of analysis centered [sic] on ‘world’ is: ‘who is doing what with who that affects the resulting work of art? The basic question of analysis centered on field seems to me to be: who dominates who, using what strategies and resources, with what results.” (Becker and Pessin, 2006, p.285)

Thus, for Becker art is a social process, characterised by a division of labour and the social relationships involved in the production process (including the shared process of socially producing an aesthetic). Within this world artists are constrained by four sets of social relations: shared conventions and norms; technologies and media of production (e.g. the introduction of oil paint, new pigments etc.); patrons, sponsors and art markets; and public reception and tastes (Becker, 1984; Harrington, 2004). Becker does acknowledge that conventions can change, just as he recognises “political shifts and struggles within the art worlds” (Becker, 1984, p.152). His interest, however, is in the process of change – the different types of networks of relationships that get formed, by and through which participants respond to change.

Although Becker recognizes the political processes at play within the art world, according to Chaplin (1994), by adopting an empirical approach critical of theory that would give the artist relative autonomy and treat art as a special case, Becker has effectively taken a political position, one which means that “he makes no judgements about art whatsoever” (Chaplin, 1994, p.173). In his later work, however, Becker’s position viz-a-viz the art object has shifted, to the extent that he and his fellow authors acknowledge that “there has always been a blind spot in the sociology of art: any discussions of specific artworks” Becker, et al, 2006, p.1). In his own contribution (in relation to jazz music), Becker describes how he considered, but ultimately decided not to include a sociological analysis of a famous jazz work, as an example of an analysis of the “work itself” (Becker, 2006). This, however, was not because of the ‘work itself’, and the complexities of addressing (sociologically) its sensuous properties, per se, but because it required “detailed knowledge of the work and of the organized context in which it was made” (Becker, 2006, p.27).

Other empirical analyses of the processes by which art worlds are constructed and sustained, are to be found, for example, in the work of DiMaggio. In his analysis of the institutionalisation of ‘high culture’ and ‘high cultural institutions’ in 19th Century Boston, DiMaggio (1986) describes

the process of 'sacralization of art' by Boston's "cultural capitalists". DiMaggio (1987) also examines the systems for classifying artworks. However, in developing a systematic theory of genre development and differentiation, DiMaggio rejects consideration of the works' thematic content to focus on two processes that come together in "artistic classification processes":

"Processes by which genre distinctions are created, ritualized and eroded, and processes by which tastes are produced as part of the sense-making and boundary-defining activities of social groups." (DiMaggio, 1987, p.441)

What is largely missing from these accounts of 'art worlds' or 'fields' is the differential distribution and exercise of power in defining what constitutes 'art', the 'artist', criteria of evaluation and genre and canon formation based not on socio-economic status or class, but on the fluid and overlapping markers of identity such as gender, race and ethnicity and sexual orientation (Battersby, 1994; Brand and Korsmeyer, 1995; hooks, 1990, 1995; Jones, 2002; Nochlin, 1989, 1999; Pollock, 2003 [1988], Wolff, 1990, 2006). Further, at the point of consumption or reception of the individual artworks, there is a need to reflect on arguments for polysemic readings by the 'viewers' or 'readers' (Barthes, 1977 [1968]), as well analyses of, on the one hand, the signifying properties of artworks (Barthes, 1985 [1957]; Hall, 2003 [1997]; Rose, 2003) and on the other, their discursive function - constitutive of, and constituted by, subjectivities and identities (Butler, 1993, 2006 [1990]; Foucault, 1998 [1976], 2006a [1966], 2006b [1969]; Hall, 2003 [1997]; Mulvey, 1975; Rose, 2003). This, to paraphrase Prior (2005), calls for an "alternative post-modern approach".

Insofar as the 'art world' and the disciplines of art history and sociology emerged from the structural differentiation characteristic of modernity, post-modernity has been characterised as emerging from a process of de-differentiation, articulated as:

"The post-modern attempt to drain the aura from the work of art...in the post-modernist refusal to separate the author from his or her oeuvre or the

audience from the performance; in the post-modernist transgression of the boundary between literature and theory, between high and popular culture, between what is properly cultural and what is properly social.” (Lash, 1988, p.312)

As a term, post-modernism first emerged in the 1970s when it was associated with the overshadowing of the architecture associated with high modernism by a more playful style (Harrington, 2004; Harvey, 1992).^{*} As a social theory its emergence is associated with Lyotard’s (1984 [1979]) analysis of the ‘post-modern condition’ and what he perceived to be the ‘loss of credibility’ of the grand or meta-narratives and the shift, in terms of the legitimation of knowledge, toward a “plurality of languages”. Specifically in relation to art and aesthetics, the post-modern, for Lyotard, is that which, in the modern:

“Puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms...that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable...the work [the artist/writer] produces are [sic] not in principle governed by pre-established rules...Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for.” (Lyotard, 1984 [1979], p.81)

Whether as a concept, or ‘problematic’ (Burgin, 1986), what post-modernism is or what it describes has been contested. No attempt is made here to explore or critique the concept but rather to acknowledge that it is intimately connected with late 20th century early 21st century theorising and practice in relation to art, aesthetics and visual culture. As summarised by Harrington:

“Postmodernism in art theory is associated with the dissolution of ideas of internal progressive development in artistic language...It is associated with a discrediting of prejudices in favour of ‘depth’, ‘purity’, and ‘authenticity’ in art over and against surface, play, eclecticism and hybridization between genres, forms and materials. It is associated with the dissolution of binary oppositions between ‘high culture’ and ‘low culture’ and a blurring of art’s

^{*} Felski (1995) makes a distinction between the (gendered) nature of modernity as a construction of historical time, and modernism as an aesthetic category to describe texts sharing particular unifying features produced between 1890 and 1940. Harvey (1992) too makes explicit the distinction between modernity, emergent from the 18th century and associated with the Enlightenment, and “cultural modernism”, an early 20th century response by artists to “a new mythology” “as to what the eternal and mutable might be about in the midst of all the ephemerality, fragmentation, and patent chaos of modern life” (p.18). The following, however, reflects the terms used by the relevant authors cited.

boundaries into popular culture and the mass media.” (Harrington, 2004, p.21)

These themes of plurality, the breaking down of boundaries, of post-modernism’s “acceptance of [...] ephemerality, fragmentation and discontinuity” (Harvey, 1992, p.44), and its distinguishing characteristics such as ‘dispersal’, ‘indeterminacy’, ‘surface’, ‘absence’ and ‘performance’ (Hassan, 1985, in Harvey 1992), play out across the case studies discussed in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

In the push and shove over and within time in sociology’s engagement with ‘art’ the individual artwork or art object has been the site of acts of commission and omission. Not only are works engaged in a ‘struggle’ for position within the field of other art objects (Rubio and Silva, 2013), they have also struggled, qua objects with their own affordances, to achieve an object position within the discipline of sociology. Yet, if as Rubio and Silva (2013) contend, artworks operate both “within social forces, and as social forces in themselves” (p.174), then arguably, their capacity to “actively shape how the field is organized” could extend from the field of art to the sociological field. It is to the position of the object’s location in this field, and the potentialities this may offer, which is the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

2.3 Facing the art object: problematics for a sociology of art

2.3.1 How has sociology engaged with the art object?

As sketched out in the previous sub-section, for sociology, ‘art’ as a subject for disciplinary consideration has been constructed as an institution, illustrative of wider social process and, or, as embodying, within its very fabric, its practices, its processes and its ‘products’, wider social processes, specifically relations of power. As a corollary, it is conceptualised as a ‘field’ that serves to reproduce these unequal relations between dominant and dominated social groups. However, being relatively autonomous it also contains within it the potential for subversive or oppositional practices and readings.

In this concern to reveal the social and historical contingency of 'art' as an institution, the art object qua 'material' object with sensuous properties, has occupied a problematic position. There is, in fact, no shortage of *sociological* or *social theoretical* analyses of art works (see for example, Berger, 1972; Foucault, 2006a [1966]), 2011 [c1971]; Hadjinicolaou, 1978; Raphael (1980 [1933]; Simmel, 2005 [1916]; Smith and Jenks, 2000, 2006; Witkin 1995, 1997, 2005). But while valuable and insightful in their different ways in illuminating different social processes, these analyses are largely 'centripetal', that is from social theory to art, with the artwork serving "as no more than an indicator or springboard for understanding extra-aesthetic aspects of society" (Zolberg, 1997, p.9), rather than 'centrifugal', that is where the artwork is afforded the capacity to be a "source of existential social knowledge that is its own worth" (Harrington, 2004, p.3).

Thus, Simmel's discussion of portraits by Rembrandt, aims to focus on the paintings themselves, but primarily to argue that what they reveal is the emergence of a new form of individuality, one displaying the historical dimensions of the represented person, rather than, as in the Early Modern period, the individual's apparently timeless qualities (Simmel, 2005 [1916]; Scott and Staubmann, 2005). In fact, as Wolff (2008) points out, although Simmel refers to 32 paintings by Rembrandt in the course of his argument, these appear to be largely incidental to his wider project of focusing on the singular to reveal the wider historical moment.

Max Raphael's (1980 [1933]) Marxist account does aim to give more focused attention to the artworks. In seeking the development of both a sociology of art which would relate the art work to the socio-economic stage of society in which it was constructed and, dialectically related to this, a 'science' of art which would systematically analyse the art work's internal nature, Raphael sought to develop a method that recognised the relative autonomy of works of art and the social contexts of their production (Chaplin, 1994). In his analysis of works by Picasso, for example, Raphael's aim was to "investigate the material and ideological conditions that have influenced him [Picasso] and how he has reacted to them in his art" (Raphael, 1980 [1933], p.166). He

does this through a back and forth between an account of individual paintings and Picasso's position within, and response to, contemporary bourgeois society. Underpinning his approach Raphael aimed to justify visual art's liberatory potential and although, according to Chaplin (1994), his belief in the critical function of a radical art practice, continues to make him relevant to "critical artists", the images themselves are at risk of being at the service of this wider, though nonetheless, important project.

From a different, and later 20th Century perspective, Witkin too seeks to develop a strategy for analysing individual paintings in ways that reveal something about the wider social formations in which they are produced (Witkin, 1995, 1997, 2005). From a starting point that views works of art as 'semiotic systems', Witkin, aims to examine the link between art and social structure at the level of 'styles' of art, that is the presentational codes or principles "governing the selection of aesthetic elements in realizing a given level of abstraction in a work of art" (Witkin, 1995, p.26). The concept of abstraction is important for Witkin, for whom it describes the level of 'autonomy' and distance between the 'ideational' process and 'contact relations'. Positing (following Hegel) a developmental model, Witkin suggests a lower level of abstraction (between, for example, maker and object) in 'archaic art', a higher level in Early Modern 'perceptual realism', and with modernist abstract art "a more or less autonomous subjectivity is realized" (Witkin, p.1995, p.13). Witkin develops his arguments through his analysis of a number of paintings including van Eyck's *The Marriage of Giovanni (?) Arnolfini and Giovanna Cenami (?)* (1434) and later works by Cezanne (Witkin, 1995) and Manet, including *Olympia* (Witkin, 1997). Witkin argues that while the presentational codes of 'perceptual-realist' art represented social interaction from the perspective of the individual, the modernist presentation codes emergent in the work of Cezanne and Manet, "comprehend[...] social experience as constitutive of the subject, as constituting an intrasubjective rather than an intersubjective order" (Witkin, 1997, p. 107-8). The aesthetic strategies employed in Manet's *Olympia*, for example, such as 'flatness' and juxtaposed, unrealistic views of figures or objects, are seen, by Witkin as art's response to a social world in which

intrasubjective experience is problematic: a social world in which the gendered 'values' of (economic) motive or instrumentality are in conflict with the solidarity and value-governed domestic sphere.

Again, while Witkin's approach opens up analysis at the level of the artwork itself, the image still has the air of being an argument for, or illustration of something outside itself, the painting *Olympia*, for example, "subverts and deconstructs" the cultural configuration of bourgeois ideology, and the contemporary critical reaction to the painting reflects an inability to meet the "semiotic provocation" of modernity's "corruption of value" (Witkin, 1997).

Sociologists Smith and Jenks (2006) have questioned approaches which "seek[.] to explicate the imagery, content and manner of production of works of art through reference to their social context" (p.157) and seek to retain the focus on painting as "the genuine subject". Their response, however, as in the case of their analysis of Manet's *Olympia* (1863-5)⁹, is to draw on complexity theory (not, it should be noted, aesthetic theory or theories of art) to examine the, arguably, 'extra-aesthetic' question of how the painting socially informs and develops what it is to see. The sensuous properties of the image as painting (outwith an analysis of the relationship between colour and form), and its capacity to be "a source of existential knowledge that is of its own worth" (Harrington, 2004, p.3) again perhaps remains underexplored.

As noted above, for some commentators the reluctance to engage with the object in and of itself is sociology's "blind spot" (Becker, et al, 2006; De la Fuente, 2007). The privileging of a social theorising of art that imposes its own conceptual frameworks and fails to see art in its own terms and as its own discourse has also been criticised by commentators such as Heywood

⁹ Although outwith the scope of the thesis there would be a value in exploring why and how one painting becomes an 'icon', not just within the field of art but (and perhaps because of its iconicity in this field), in the 'field' of social theorizing. A number of commentators have, for example used Manet's *Olympia* to articulate or illustrate their arguments for the emergence of a particular historical or social formation, or for what it expresses of discourses of race or gender or the constitution of the subject or subject position (see for example, Clark, 1985; Foucault, 2011 [c. 1971]; Pollock, 1999; Smith and Jenks, 2006; Witkin, 1997).

(1997) for whom “some social theorising is socially destructive, both of art and, ultimately, perhaps of, theory” (p.5).

The hesitancy, or oscillation on the part of sociology to address the art object in its own terms, appears to hinge on three interconnected problems: first, how to define and ‘talk’ about the ‘art’ object; second, how to treat works of art in a way that takes seriously the possibility of their intrinsic value, while also engaging in political critiques of received ideas of aesthetic value (Harrington, 2004); and third, following on from this, how to face the art object in ways that do not breach disciplinary boundaries of value distanciation on the one hand (and retain value neutrality, in the Weberian sense (Heinich, 1997 [1996]; Danko, 2008)) and, on the other, do not risk straying into disciplinary areas outwith sociology’s purview. Each of these issues will be briefly explored in turn, before examining calls for some form of ‘synthesis’.

2.3.2 The elusive object

“The work of art is an object which exists as such only by virtue of the collective belief which knows and acknowledges it as a work of art...A rigorous science of art must...assert the possibility and necessity of understanding the work in its reality as a fetish: it has to take into account everything which helps to constitute the works as such, not least the discourses of direct or disguised celebration which are among the social conditions of production of the work of art qua object of belief.” (Bourdieu, 2004, p.35)

"An ordinary object elevated to the dignity of a work of art by the mere choice of an artist." Duchamp, (or possibly Breton) on ‘readymades’ (<http://www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Readymades-of-Marcel-Duchamp.pdf>. Accessed 23 May 2015)

For sociology the ‘art’ object is, to use a cliché, both a topic and resource. As already intimated in section 2.2, the processes by which an object comes to be defined as ‘art’, and the associated social construction of the hierarchies of high ‘art’ and popular culture are at the heart of sociology’s engagement with the field of cultural production. In fact, for an anthropologist such as

Gell (1998), what distinguishes a specifically sociological account of 'art' is precisely this concern with "the institutional recognition of art objects" (p. 12). So, for example, in his earlier work Becker (1984) locates the definition of an object as 'art' within the 'art' institution itself.

The problem for sociologists seeking to engage with the artwork qua artwork "in itself" (Becker, 2006), is that they "are caught up in the object they would take as their object" (Bourdieu 2005 [1992], p.296). The very terms used to characterize, perceive and evaluate the object are socially and historically situated, and it is these "social conditions of production of the work of art qua object of belief" (Bourdieu, 2004, p.35) that, for Bourdieu constitute the authentic 'topic' for the sociological gaze. As Born (2010) notes in relation to Bourdieu's account of Flaubert, he "insistently refuses to address the art object and its aesthetic properties, and to allow them to play a part in the unfolding analysis" (p.178). Further, Bourdieu's 'sociological theory of art perception' (2004), focuses on the social processes which structure perception, 'art competence' and the capacity to 'decipher' the meaning of a work of art, but it does not offer a sociological perception of the artwork/object.

For those sociologists who would seek to recuperate the object, such as those described in section 2.3.1 above, the process by which these works (such as *Olympia*) become 'art' is left largely unaddressed. For others such as Blau (2001) and Harrington (2004) 'art' is defined in terms of its characteristics of sensuousness and capacity to communicate ideas in imaginative form.

Arguably, what links these 'sociologies' is a conceptualisation of art's 'specificity', whether approached as an institution or as an object. Wolff (1983) suggests that the idea of the 'specificity' of art has been used in three senses. First, it is used to describe the historical separation of artistic activity from other areas of social life, and the associated specialisation of aesthetic modes of perception. Second, the concept is understood to describe the relative autonomy of art in relation to socio-economic factors, that is although art is understood as a social product, ideology is mediated through

the specific codes and conventions of artistic representation. The third usage is to refer to the specific characteristics of art, an approach that recognises the distinctive properties of art, but rejects notions of essentialism and universality. Notwithstanding the potential argument that ‘specificity’ as applied to art is an effect of ideology, it is in the latter sense that commentators such as Harrington (2004), and also Blau (2001) use the term.

The notion of the specificity of art appears to be at the core of Harrington’s (2004) call for a sociology of the arts that takes seriously the possibility of artworks’ intrinsic aesthetic value. For Harrington this specificity implies that works of art can possess “aesthetic value in themselves and do not possess value *only* in virtue of different social *perspectives* of valuation” (2004, p.101, emphases in original). Thus, aesthetic judgements, while different from scientific statements and moral norms insofar as they cannot be deemed to be true or false, or right or wrong, do have their own validity, over and above the views of ‘asserting’ agents (Harrington, 2004). This call to take aesthetic value ‘seriously’ is however, perhaps the biggest stumbling block to sociology’s engagement with the artwork or art object.

2.3.3 Art and ‘Aesthetics’

“Beauty is made up of an eternal invariable element, whose quantity it is excessively difficult to determine, and of a relative, circumstantial element, which will be...whether severally, or all at once, the age, its fashions, its morals, its emotions.” (Baudelaire, 1995, [1863] p.3)

No attempt is made here to present an historiography or archaeology of ‘aesthetics’. Some brief comments are, however, included here because of the relevance of this discourse to considerations of sociology’s engagement with, or distance from the art object. In particular, the apparent oscillation between, on the one hand, a desire to engage with aesthetics to further understand the art or cultural object, qua object, and its relation to wider social processes, but at the same time a hesitancy or disquiet both about addressing questions of value as part of the sociological project, and about the extent to which the concept of aesthetics itself both articulates and disguises or renders invisible relations of power.

As a discipline, aesthetics has been practised not as a branch of art history or criticism but of philosophy, engaging with questions regarding the nature of art, aesthetic experience and aesthetic judgement (Wolff, 1983). The term 'aesthetic', however, has been described as a "vague, polysemic, contested and shifting signifier" (Shusterman, 2006 p.237). This ambiguity stems both from the complexity and contested nature of the notions of art and beauty with which the concept has become inextricably linked and because of its own "complicated, heterogeneous, conflicted and disordered genealogy" (Shusterman, 2006, p.143).

Although 'traditional aesthetics' originated in the 18th Century (Wolff, 1983), its genealogy can be traced back to Plato's theories of beauty and art, the latter being regarded as a pale imitation of the ideal rational Forms, for which beauty, by contrast is an exemplar. Aristotle attempted to redeem art by arguing for the cognitive value of *mimesis* as a means of learning. Aristotle also introduced principles for formalistic analysis and evaluation of art works – criteria, which were independent, of and not reducible to, "ontology, epistemology, psychology, morality and politics" (Shusterman, 2006 p.238).

In the context of ancient philosophy 'art' encompassed skill or knowledge. The subsequent narrowing of its application just to modern conceptions of fine art emerged with the development of the concept of the aesthetic in the work of predominantly German philosophers from the mid-18th Century. In his summary Shusterman (2006) describes "three distinct axes" for understanding this emergent concept. First, the work of Baumgarten, writing in the 1750s who construed aesthetics, (and coined the term) as a general science of sensory perception (*aesthesis*) – including, but not confined to the perception of beauty, and which extended beyond art, to encompass nature and daily practices. Second, Kant's aesthetics as a theory of taste that emphasises beauty and the sublime in nature and in art, a judgement which is subjective, but 'disinterested', and therefore universal. In addition, for Kant "beautiful art is possible only as a product of genius", that is born of a unique creator, whose "genius is the inborn predisposition of the mind through which nature gives the rule to art" (Kant, in Robbins, 2006, p.14).

The third of Shusterman's axes is Hegel's aesthetics as the philosophy of *art*, a science dealing only with 'artistic beauty' (specifically excluding natural beauty), and which was concerned with the high truths expressed in art.

Mirroring the comment by Baudelaire (1995 [1863]) at the beginning of this section, one of the fundamental debates is between those who argue for the 'ineffability' of art, for its meaning and value to 'transcend' the social and political, and those, at the other extreme who argue that all meaning and value is, effectively, socially and historically contingent.

Given the nature of these problematics, sociology's own responses reflect different orders of argument within the discipline, such that it is perhaps more appropriate to speak not only of "multiple aesthetics" (Felski, 2005) but multiple sociologies.

Wolff (1983), in fact, distinguishes four positions in the "Sociology versus Aesthetics" debate.¹⁰ First, a position that defends the specificity of the aesthetic and rejects the incursion of 'extra aesthetic' social factors in the evaluation of art. A contemporary example might be the work of Zangwill (2002), for whom aesthetic pleasure and experience are human universals and the main criteria for judgement (cross culturally) is correctness and consistency.

A second position asserts the social and ideological construction of art, but a view that art, or 'good' art transcends its conditions of production, (for example, Adorno (1976 [1962]) in Zolberg, (1997).

Third, are those approaches that argue, against concepts of immanence or transcendence, that the production, reception and assessment of artworks are always and only (or primarily) socio-historical events. Wolff includes here the work written in the 1970's by Hadjinicolaou (1978), but this approach could, in different ways, encompass feminist and post-colonial critiques of

¹⁰ For the current purposes the order of these four 'positions' does not follow that set out by Wolff.

the naturalising and 'masculinist' discourse of traditional aesthetics, with its assumptions of male creative 'genius' (Battersby, 1994), a male 'gaze' (Mulvey, 1975) and a universalist conceptualisation of beauty, which is, rather, socially and historically contingent and rendered synonymous with the white female body (Jones, 2002). From this perspective traditional aesthetics has functioned as "an ideology of control" and a strategy of exclusion (Jones, 2002, p.220): of women artists from the 'canon' of 'great' artists (Nochlin, 1989; Parker and Pollock, 1981; Pollock, 1999); of an alternative gaze; of different forms of creativity (hook, 1990; Murray and Murray, 2006); and of different conceptualisations of 'beauty'.

Bourdieu's (2005 [1992]) argument that the discourse of the 'pure aesthetic', of a 'disinterested' gaze and a functionless work is a particular experience of a work of art "situated in social space and historical time" (p.285) and the "properties of an experience which is in fact the product of privilege" (p. 289) could also be positioned crudely within this third 'position'. For Bourdieu this situatedness also implies that not only aestheticians but also theoreticians of the aesthetic may be unwittingly engaged in the struggles that, in Bourdieu's terms, yield the meaning and value of the work.

From yet another perspective Becker's (1984) analysis of 'Art Worlds', discussed earlier, could be crudely included here. For Becker (1984) aesthetics and the 'work' aestheticians do are among the "questions of social organization" with which his study of 'Art Worlds' is concerned. For Becker 'aesthetics' "is an activity rather than a doctrine", it is a system that provides:

"A basis on which people can evaluate things in a reliable and dependable way, makes regular patterns of co-operation possible...aesthetic value arises from the consensus of the participants in an art world." (Becker 1984, p.134)

From this perspective a sociologically based theory of aesthetics would be an "idle exercise", "since only aesthetics developed in connection with the operations of art worlds are likely to have much influence in them" (Becker, 1984 p.145). Against Becker's approach Zolberg (1997) has argued that by

leaving out questions of evaluation, and assuming consensus Becker also risks implicitly leaving out issues of power – of exploring why certain art forms or genres come to be more highly valued than others. For Harrington (2004) Becker's accounts (and by extension other accounts which focus on systems and processes) can say nothing about aesthetic content – the factors that make objects meaningful, nor aesthetic norms, which, for Harrington are “of a different order both from wider social mores and from the institutional structures that shape artists' careers” (p.37).

This alludes to the fourth, and Wolff's preferred position in her 1983 work, which argues for (the development of) a sociologically informed theory of the aesthetic that takes account of the social production and reception, but also attempts to account for the specificity of art. Harrington (2004) similarly argues for a mediating position that takes seriously the possibility of intrinsic aesthetic value at the level of the object and the political dynamic of context. In effect, it is argued that it is not just 'aesthetics' as an articulation of social relations of power to which sociology should attend, but the power *of* art, as sensuous and meaningful experience, as productive of 'self and subjectivities' (deNora, 2004) and its potential to be 'empowering' or “subversive and critical” (Blau, 2001).

In its engagement with both the individual art object and the social context in which and of which it is a part, the following chapters explore the potential and problems of a synthesis of positions 'three' and 'four' in Wolff's (1983) summary. There is, however, a further 'position' that reflects the on-going development of both the sub-discipline and wider sociological endeavour since Wolff's earlier work, that is the mutually constitutive nature of the art or cultural object. Hennion's (2007) discussion of the role of objects as 'actants' or co-producers in the expression of taste is one articulation of this, drawing as it does on Actor-Network-Theory (ANT). Developed initially within science and technology studies in the 1980's, this seeks to break down the (artificial) distinction between the social and natural, to argue for the 'agency' of both human subjects and non-human objects – or 'actants' - linked together through networks or associations, creating 'assemblages'. It

is a 'method', which allows 'things', including (by extension) artworks to 'strike back' (Latour, 2000; 2005), that is for objects to effectively have parity in attempts to understand how networks are built, stabilise and change: it is not, for example about the social construction of art, but about how the social is 'reassembled' (Latour, 2005) through the networks of 'actants'. Thus, Hennion (2007), in his critique of theories of the social construction of taste, describes the process of 'co-formation' of both the *amateur* and the object: a process by which the individual becomes reflexively aware of the object, and by which the objects "advance...their power to make themselves more present" (p.105). In this account "objects are not already there, inert and available at our service, they deliver themselves, unrobe themselves, impose themselves on us" (Hennion, 2007, p.105-106). Thus 'taste' is not to be explained by hidden social causes, nor as imminent to the object, but:

"A collective technique whose analysis helps us to understand the ways we make ourselves sensitized to things, to situations and moments, while simultaneously controlling how those feelings might be shared and discussed with others." (Hennion, 2007, p.97)

'Taste' is therefore effectively 'co-produced' between the *amateur* and the art object. In other words, as Hennion remarks, "beautiful things only offer themselves to those who offer themselves to beautiful things" (2007, p.106).¹¹

2.3.4 Disciplinary boundaries and principles: value-distanciation versus value-affirmation

There are, arguably, at least two 'disciplinary' boundaries to consider in the turn to the art object: within sociology, and between sociology and other disciplines, specifically, in this context, art history.

With regard to the first, the study of art as a 'cultural' institution and artworks as products of that institution fits within the different sub-disciplinary approaches delineated by Wolff (2005) and Inglis et al (2007). On the one hand, it can be located within the broad 'sociology of culture'

¹¹ Although not about *aesthetics* or 'taste' per se, Mitchell (2005) similarly explores the ways in which 'pictures' have agency in the sense that people respond to them *as if* they were alive and, in Mitchell's terms, driven by desires and appetites.

approach, which, according to Inglis et al (2007), draws on existing sociological concepts and methods to investigate cultural issues such as consumption patterns.

On the other hand, it can be situated within a more narrowly defined 'cultural sociology' as a particular type of sociology associated with the American sociologist Jeffrey Alexander. The 'Alexander paradigm' focuses on human meanings, symbols and cultural structures (Inglis et al, 2007). It is an approach that, according to Inglis et al is "a special sort of conceptual and methodological enterprise" (2007, p.10). Thus Eyerman (2006) seeks a shift towards a "meaningful" sociology of the arts:

"One in which creation and imagination are central components...an interactionist, non-mechanistic model of imagining and experiencing, as well as making, where meaning is conceptualized as an emergent property in the interaction between subject and object." (Eyerman, 2006, p.32)

In very general terms the current thesis is located within broader sociology of culture 'paradigm' rather than the 'Alexander paradigm'.¹²

The focus on the art object also opens onto to the potential for blurring, if not crossing, the disciplinary boundary between sociology and art history. Accounting for the historical emergence of the different fields of vision of the two disciplines Tanner (2003) (drawing on Mannheim) describes the ways in which the two 'institutional locations' of sociology and art history led them to see largely the same objects in different ways. According to Tanner, art history has been centrally concerned with questions of aesthetic value, and is:

"Characterised by 'authentic' painstaking and direct engagement with the art object, and by an interest in artistic individuality both of particular artworks and of artists as manifested in the constructive role of form." (Tanner, 2003, p.13)

¹² It is acknowledged that there are also further disciplinary boundaries between a sociology of art and 'cultural studies' (see Wolff, 2005) and also studies of material culture, but here the main focus is on the overlaps and disjunctures with the disciplines most closely associated with the specifically visual 'art' object.

Sociology, on the other hand, is concerned with the context of an object, not its intrinsic aesthetic values:

"Sociology by definition seeks to understand the object above all in terms of its functional contribution to social processes, and to define the period being studied in terms of its characteristic social structure, the groups which compose that structure, and which produce and use the works of art in question." (Tanner, 2003, p.14, citing Mannheim, 1982)

While perhaps these characterisations may have been broadly consistent with the practice of the two disciplines, particularly in the first half of the 20th Century when Mannheim was writing, in the recent past two developments have perhaps made the boundaries less distinct. On the one hand, the 1960s saw the emergence of 'the new art history' (Alpers, 1977; Rees and Borzello, 1986). Associated in its early stages with the work of the Marxist art historian T.J Clark, Rees and Borzello (1986) see it as reflecting the impact of feminist, Marxist, structuralist and psychoanalytic ideas on the discipline. In place of an approach to the artwork which focused on issues of style, attribution, establishing authenticity and meaning, the new art history sought to locate the art object within its particular social and historical context, to view the artwork "like any other event, [as] a piece of history" (Alpers, 1977). This was accompanied by a desire to question and demystify the process of artistic creation, the processes by which art is constituted as 'art', and a rejection of the art historian's own claims to be 'value free', and as a corollary, increased reflexivity on the role of art historians as 'makers of knowledge' (Alpers, 1977). In the process, the disciplinary discourse shifted: 'style', 'genius' and 'connoisseurship' and 'quality' were replaced by terms drawn from social science discourses such as 'ideology', 'patriarchy', 'class' (Rees and Borzello, 1986). In reversing the process of beginning with the artwork and looking outwards, to looking from society to the art it produces, this approach, for Rees and Borzello, risks shifting the pendulum too far, "too much stress on the social aspect of art ignores the qualities which make it art rather than something else" (1986, p.8).

On the other hand, within sociology there is evidence of a reverse yearning among some theorists for an orientation toward the art object which

recognises that paintings are political, but not wholly so, that although socially 'produced' they retain some element of specificity and autonomy. For these sociologists, there is, in Harrington's terms, an aspiration for a synthesis between the value distancing methods of the social science and the value affirming "impulses" of the humanities (Harrington, 2004; Wolff 1983; Zolberg 1997).

In the light of art history's own 'cultural turn', this raises questions about the boundaries between a critical art history and sociological critique. It also requires being alert to arguments that suggest that engaging with questions of aesthetic judgement is outwith the purview of sociology, at best as an "idle exercise" (Becker 1984), or at worst, breaching a perceived founding principle of value-distanciation. Harrington (2004) and Zolberg (1997), for example, locate sociology's reluctance to engage with aesthetics at the level of the object as a function of the discipline's desire to avoid the "evaluative posture" associated with humanistic disciplines (Zolberg, 1997). Witkin (1997) suggests that this 'nervousness' is also due to the lack of methodological resources and specialist expertise available to sociologists to tackle the artwork itself. This perhaps mirrors Becker's (2006) own later concerns, described above, about analysing the artwork 'itself'.

Further, as discussed earlier, an account of power, as the use of the discourse of the aesthetic to represent and legitimise class (gender and race) interests, in determining differential access to the processes which define 'art', and in particular in relation to the processes by which valuation and meaning are attributed and the validation given to those assessments, must be central to a sociological account of the arts. But in the shift towards an approach that seeks to redress the balance from a consideration of the 'extra-aesthetic' to one that, at least partially, 'gives back' a degree of autonomy to the art object, there is a risk of losing sight of aesthetics *as* power. In place of analyses of aesthetics as a function of power and the artwork as a "fetish" (Bourdieu, 2004, 2005 [1992]), Harrington (2004), for example, seeks to reclaim some sense of the potential 'universality' of value affirmation, particularly by recourse to the notion of "intersubjectively generalizable defensibility" (p.5).

But while Harrington seeks to retain the partial autonomy of aesthetic valuation from questions of social power, it is Bourdieu's analysis that reveals that aesthetics is cogent precisely because of what it reveals about the operation and legitimation of unequal power relations. While theoretically it may be possible to argue that validity claims and the grounds for those claims are outwith extra-aesthetic influence, that is outwith claimants' "immediate subjective situation", in practice, as Prior (2004) notes, the claims of some groups are given lesser validity than others, precisely because of extra-aesthetic factors.

Wolff (2006, 2008) attempts to address this in her argument for a 'grounded beauty' one informed by criteria of judgement that are "ideally":

"The product of reflexive deliberation in the context of communities of interpretation...[being clear] that the communities in play are not free-floating...but are always grounded in structures and institutions of relative and differential power." (Wolff, 2008, p.25)

For Wolff a synthesis of ideological critique and aesthetic judgement can be achieved through "reasoned dialogue in the context of community" (Wolff, 2006, p.151), an approach which foregrounds "the complex intersection of the aesthetic and the political as they relate to questions of gender...so that the mechanisms of representation are likely to be exposed" (p.155). In an 'application' of this 'principled aesthetic' to 20th Century English art, Wolff, argues:

"...It is not a question of the 'right' criteria for aesthetic judgement...the important project is to make transparent the grounds for judgement as well as the possible interests invested in evaluations...A principled aesthetics, explicit about the cultural context of judgements, takes English art on its own terms without absconding from the broader, more challenging questions of the value of art." (Wolff, 2008, p.50 - 51)

What arguments such as that posited by Wolff (2006, 2008) and Harrington (2004) leave unresolved are what such approaches would 'look' like, in what ways they would be specifically *sociological*, and how they would, in practice redress fundamental power differentials.

2.4. Achieving a synthesis?

Notwithstanding the problematics of a specifically sociological account of the art object, as has been noted throughout, there has been a call to engage with the artwork itself, and an increasing “confidence” to overcome a hitherto “blind spot” in relation to “the concrete work that aesthetic factors perform in social life” (Blau, 2001; Born, 2010; De la Fuente 2007; Eyerman, 2006; Harrington 2004; Heywood, 1997; Rubio and Silva, 2013; Smith and Jenks, 2000, 2006; Witkin, 1995, 1997, 2005; Wolff, 2006, 2008).

Commentators such as Bowler (1994), Harrington (2004), Wolff (2006; 2008) and Zolberg (1997), who explicitly argue for the validity and value of a sociological engagement with issues of judgement, experience and meaning at the level of the art or cultural object, make the case that strict value neutrality on the part of the researcher is neither entirely achievable nor wholly desirable. On the one hand, as Bowler (1994) argues, and Bird (1979) demonstrates, choices of what to study, who or what is included (or excluded) in the study of art and art practices, even what constitutes ‘art’ are based on value or aesthetic judgements, albeit implicit ones, on the part of the researcher. On the other hand, Harrington (2004) argues that in the sociology of the arts “value judgements should be allowed to come into play” but in ways that do not undermine “scientific impartiality” (Harrington, 2004, p.5). This is based on the assumptions that for the sociology of the arts to be “truly ‘meaningfully adequate’ to its subject it must involve some evaluative engagement with the normative contents of its subject” (Harrington, 2004, p. 38) and that value judgements about works of art, as noted above, can have “intersubjectively generalizable defensibility” (2004, p.5). To maintain value distance, however, necessitates both an engagement in political critiques of received ideas of aesthetic value and maintaining a distance from “acts of normative advocacy about art” (Harrington, 2004, p.5).

For Harrington (2004) and Wolff (1983) the challenge is to achieve a sociology of the arts and of aesthetics, which neither seeks to account for

aesthetic experience and evaluation by resort to essentialist or universalist characteristics, nor to reduce explanations solely to extra-aesthetic factors. In effect, the 'specificity' of art necessitates a 'specificity' of sociological understanding; one which, in Harrington's terms, "fosters an understanding of art in which art objects and practices are experienced as value-relevant sources of sensuous knowledge" (2004, p.207).

As commented above, what is largely missing from Harrington's (2004) account is how to generate this understanding empirically. By bringing together both theory and empirical research, Born (2010), does make a concrete attempt to produce a synthesis between 'the social and the aesthetic', with a view to providing a "non-reductive account of the aesthetic in theorising cultural production" (p.172). Drawing on recent anthropology Born identifies five "themes" with a view to 'reinventing' an explanatory theory of cultural production: aesthetics and the cultural object; the place of institutions; agency and subjectivity; questions of history, temporality and change; and problems of value and judgement. Illustrating her approach by reference to her own empirical work in relation to the field of contemporary music and BBC television output, Born's analysis seeks to bring together both the object, qua object, issues of "authorial subjectivity", institutional and social context, the historical context of 'genres' of work, which individual objects may both reflect but also be generative of in terms of aesthetic and formal conventions, and questions of value and judgement.

2.5 Returning the gaze

What this very schematic overview of sociology's engagement with 'art' and the art object illustrates is that while addressing the ways "social relations and institutions impact upon the creation, distribution and appreciation of artworks" (Inglis, 2005a, p.19) is seen as appropriately within the sociological gaze, historically, the art object as an object 'in itself' has been its (comparative) 'blind spot'. Latterly, however the object is increasingly coming into focus. In part through wider disciplinary (and inter-disciplinary) developments such as Actor Network Theory, which seeks to give parity to 'non-human' things as 'actants', but also through what Wolff

(2008), calls a 'post critical' return to value. As the work of Born (2010), for example, demonstrates, attempts are being made to work through what an approach combining an understanding of the cultural production of 'art', and the power relations at play, together with a way of understanding the art object "as [a] value-relevant source[s] of sensuous knowledge" (Harrington, 2004, p.207) would look like.

Blau (2001) in her discussion of pieces of contemporary artwork argues that they are about "between-ness": "between different groups, races, genders, nations, generations and historical periods" (p.189), they are also about an invocation of the Other. "Between-ness", for Blau, is a "conceptual companion" to the de-centred Self of contemporary theory who or which has replaced the Kantian 'I'. The metaphor of 'between-ness' is perhaps a useful one for understanding what commentators such as Bowler (1994), Harrington (2004), Wolff (1983) and Zolberg (1997) aspire to in their call for a combined approach to understanding aesthetics with sociological understanding and critique.

It is within this emergent endeavour of achieving a 'synthesis', or a 'between-ness' that the current thesis is situated – a tentative step at exploring how this might be approached empirically in the context of visual art. Through analyses of five images drawn from 20th century portraiture, the aim is to explore a sociology of the art object which recognises these images' social embeddedness, but also that they can be generative of their own affordances. In effect the aim is to open up the space for an exchange of gazes between the art object and sociology. Although very exploratory, and in many ways raising further questions, it is suggested that the study has a contribution to make not just to a sociology of art, but potentially to the discipline as a whole in its parallel concerns with the relationships between the 'social' and the 'material'. Potentially too, it may contribute to questions posed by other disciplines concerned with the art object.

As intimated, the focus for the analysis will be examples from the art historical genre of portraiture. The nature of this genre, and the rationale for

focusing on this particular type of art and art object are the subject of the next chapter.

3. Face Value: The case of portraiture

3.1 Introduction

"The portrait image, and the writing on portraiture provides modern men and women with a visual thinking through of the place of humans in human society..." (Soussloff, 2006, p.4)

As noted in chapter 1, the focus on portraiture as a site of sociological investigation, and specifically for examining sociology's ambivalent relationship to the art object, emerged not from art but from madness. It arose from a recognition that many of the images which I had been examining with a view to understanding visual representations of mental illness were 'portraits'. That is, visual images not just in the vernacular (Western European) sense of being representations of people's faces, but also, 'portraits' as understood and constituted through the disciplinary lens of (similarly Western European) art history as being:

"...Art works, intentionally made of living or once living people by artists, in a variety of media and for an audience." (Brilliant, 2002 [1991] p.8)

Further examination of the 'genre' revealed both the complexity beneath portraiture's surface simplicity and its fundamental sociality, as a material (or virtual) art object, comprising, in its content, an "intentional" representation of (or allusion to) a 'living or once living' person or group of people, produced from a putative engagement between an 'artist' and a 'sitter' and circulating within a field of cultural production.

As this begins to suggest, portraiture is "a genre characterised by paradox" (Steiner, 1987). The portrait, as both an artwork and a representation of a presumed 'living or once living person', raises particular issues with regard to questions of value affirmation and the attribution of meaning, slipping between: consideration of the portrait as a record of the person imaged; the skill with which an artist has 'caught' the individual; and as an object of 'beauty' in and of itself.

This “oscillation between art object and human subject” (Brilliant, 2002 [1991], p.7), is also manifest in the ways in which the genre has been conceptualised as a medium reflecting changing constructions of identity and subjectivity, but also as constitutive of social and sexual difference and of difference on the basis of race and ethnicity (Brilliant, 2002 [1991]; Doy, 2002; Gabara, 2004; Jones, 2006; Pollock, 2003 [1988]; West, 2004; Woodall, 1997a).

If the term ‘portrait’ refers to the content of the image, then portraiture refers to the process of production, distribution, display/consumption (and categorisation) of the image. Pointon (1993), exploring portraiture’s discursive function in 18th Century England, defines it as both a concept and process:

“Denot[ing] all those practices connected with the depiction of human subjects and the theorization, conceptualization and apprehension of portrait representation.” (Pointon, 1993, p.1)

These processes of portraiture are in Pointon’s terms ideological and institutionalised. They are constitutive of both individual identity and subjectivity, and of national identity, through the physical ‘embodiment’ of portraits in the (literal) institution of National Portrait Galleries (Barlow, 1997; Pointon, 1993; West, 2004).

As this implies, relations of power play out through and within portraiture as object, practice and mode of representation, influencing and influenced by: differential access to the tools of representation; the ‘subjectivities’ included and excluded from the picture plane; the capacity to control one’s self-representation; the social and aesthetic conventions and codes which influence the manner of visual representation; and the power to attribute meaning to both the image and the subject in and of the image. As Gabara (2004) notes, in the context of an analysis of the portraiture of the 20th Century Brazilian artist Mário de Andrade:

“Portraits demand a definition of identity that nevertheless is troubled by the necessary influence of the perceiver’s perception of the subject. The blurred boundaries of identity cause additional problems for the mimetic function of portraiture, which at its base depends upon the notion that viewers will be able to recognize the subject portrayed...However, within this notion of recognition, the determination of who can and cannot be the subject of portraiture is itself a highly coded and hierarchical one.” (p.36)

As an art form “which plays out technologies of power” (Pointon, 2013, p.60) and offers a “visual thinking through of the place of humans in human society” (Sousslof, 2006, p.4), portraiture is therefore an important field for sociological consideration, albeit one that has, hitherto, received scant attention. It is not possible here to fully develop a sociology of portraiture (though clearly this is an area for possible future exploration), rather this chapter explores some of the characteristics and complexities of the portrait and portraiture which make it a productive genre for exploring sociology’s engagement with the art object.

A summary description of the historical evolution of the portrait is followed by an outline of the paradoxical nature of portraiture and the shifting conceptualisations of what such images purport to represent. This is followed by a brief account of the transactional nature of the portrait; the inter (and intra) subjective relationships, at the micro level, between artist, ‘sitter’ and ‘viewer’. The penultimate section widens the perspective to draw attention to the ‘macro’ processes of portrait production and display. The chapter ends with a brief summary of the issues raised.

3.2 The portrait’s biography

The following sketches out the portrait’s ‘origins’. It draws largely on art historical scholarship and literature, with all that this implies for the framing of the discourse. It is not however intended in the current context to critically analyse this material but to use it primarily as a resource.

3.2.1 Etymology

Seraller (2007) suggests that the root of the term ‘portrait’ or to portray is the Latin *protrahere* meaning ‘to draw forth or reveal’. Schneider (1994) also

refers to an older synonym “counterfeit”, from the Latin *contrafacere*, to imitate. The Italian for portrait, ‘*ritratto*’ comes from the verb ‘*ritarre*’ which means both to portray and ‘to copy or reproduce’ (West, 2004), and, until at least the mid 17th Century, could apply to the visual reproduction of any object. By the 16th Century (in Italy at least) art theory was positing a distinction between imitation or ‘*imitare*’ and portrayal (‘*ritarre*’). The former referred to the application of the artist’s skill and critical faculties in rendering visible “the ideal character of things” (Woodall, 1997a, p.1). *Ritarre*, by contrast was seen as a mechanical exercise producing a mere copy of external appearances. According to Woodall (1997a), initially these two were not mutually exclusive, it was possible to produce both an individualized resemblance and an ‘ideal’, an exemplar of virtue. Contiguous with the promotion of the status of the artist, art works were subsequently theorised as “ideal imitation as opposed to mechanical reproduction” (Woodall, 1997a, p.16). But, as both Woodall and Serraller (2007) imply, in terms of practice (as opposed to theory), for portraiture this meant resolving the contradiction proposed between producing a lifelike depiction and the ‘abstract ideal’. As summarised by Panofsky:

“A portrait aims by definition at two essentials...On the one hand it seeks to bring out whatever it is in which the sitter differs from the rest of humanity...and this is what distinguishes a portrait from an ‘ideal figure or type’. On the other hand it seeks to bring out whatever the sitter has in common with the rest of humanity...and this is what distinguishes a portrait from a figure forming part of genre painting or narrative.” (Panofsky, in West, 2004, p.24)

As suggested above, initially the term ‘portrait’ could be used to include not just images of humans but also animals, buildings and even saints (Woodall, 1997a). According to Schneider (1994), it was André Félibien who, in the 1670’s, suggested that the term ‘portrait’ be reserved for the likenesses of humans, while ‘figure’ be used for images of animals, and ‘représentation’ for plants and inorganic matter. Schneider suggests that not only does this mark the end of the medieval “symbiosis” between animals and humans, but

that Félibien's hierarchy also implies that the term individualisation could only be used in connection with humans.¹³

3.2.2 The portrait's evolution

"The first significant clusters [of self portraits] date from the tenth century. The faces may not be especially naturalistic, but that does not prevent the images in their entirety being informative, idiosyncratic and particularized."
(Hall, 2014, p.18)

Art historical commentators suggest that, geographically, the portrait has been a largely Western European art form, reflecting socially and historically contingent ideas of individuality (Pointon, 2013; West, 2004; Woodall, 1997a).¹⁴ Although generally regarded as an invention of the Renaissance (both representations by artists of others and self-portraiture) it has a much older history (Berger, 2001a; Hall, 2014; Schneider, 1994; West, 2004), with roots in Roman wax effigies of the dead and Greek sculptural busts (Serraller, 2007; West, 2004).¹⁵ According to Serraller (2007) while there are 'pre-historic' representations of the human body, it was the Greeks who produced the first "individualized" sculptural portraits around the first half of the 5th Century BCE. These were "individualized" because they were the images of "mortal heroes" – an earthly record of a dead person. Berger (2001a) makes a similar point in relation to the Fayum (or Faiyum) portraits. Painted in Roman Egypt around the late 1st century BCE or the early 1st century CE, these were portraits intended to be attached to the mummy of

¹³ Félibien has also been credited with formulating the 'hierarchy of genres', although it existed in the Italian Renaissance. In a lecture delivered to the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, published in 1667, Félibien argued that the genre of highest worth was history painting, including painting with religious, mythological or allegorical subjects. Next came portraits, landscapes and still life (see Edwards, 1999). According to West (2004), portraits were second only to history painting if they represented distinguished or heroic individuals, that is, they provided an alternative to history painting in providing the viewer with a model for emulation.

¹⁴ It is not within the scope of the current study to explore non-European depictions of 'individuals', but, again, it may be productive in a broader based sociology of portraiture to compare whether and in what ways identifiable human figures are represented in image form outwith the Western European 'tradition' (see, for example, Gell, 1998; Pinney, 1997).

¹⁵ Woodall (1997a) includes among the 'founding' portraits, Narcissus who wasted away entranced by his own reflection in a pool, the Maid of Corinth who drew the silhouette of her lover around the shadow cast by his head on a wall, and, in Christian iconography, the image of Christ imprinted on a cloth pressed against his face by Saint Veronica.

the person they portrayed. For Berger, these portraits have an “individuality [which] feel[s] like our own” (Berger, 2001a, p.53).

Focusing primarily on self-portraiture, Hall (2014) argues that, contrary to the art historical canon, “naturalistic portraiture” did not entirely disappear between the fall of the Roman Empire and the Early Modern period. Although much of the surviving medieval ‘portraiture’ focuses on attributes or symbols of position, rather than facial specificities, Hall argues that there is evidence from at least the 10th Century of a developing body of self-portraiture.

However, the ‘standard’ art historical narrative is that the 15th Century is the key turning point in the ‘rebirth’ of portraiture (Pointon, 2013; Schneider, 1994; Serraller, 2007; West, 2004; Woodall, 1997a). This was the period that, according to Woodall, saw the “adoption of intensely illusionistic, closely observed facial likeness, including idiosyncrasies and imperfections, to represent elite figures, including artists themselves” (Woodall, 1997a, p.1). On the one hand this parallels changing concepts of individuality and identity (and the emergence of the bourgeois *homo clausus* (Elias, 1994 [1939])). On the other hand (but relatedly), it points to the increasing professionalization and individualization of artists (see also chapter 2 above).¹⁶

Schneider (1994), for example, argues that the period 1420 – 1670 comprised the “Golden Age” of the individualised portrait, effectively setting the ground rules or conventions for portraiture for the following centuries. These include the production of individual, group or family portraits, composed as full-length and three-quarter length as well as ‘head and

¹⁶ The religious struggles between the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter Reformation, in the 16th Century (the Counter Reformation Council of Trent was held 1545 – 1563) has also been implicated in the development of art over this period. The Reformation was largely hostile to religious imagery, encouraging a move toward more secular subject matter. The Counter Reformation supported religious imagery within the context of the Church (West, 2004).

shoulder' portraits, presented in profile (hieratic, suggestive of dignity) and full face (suggestive of direct address)¹⁷ (Schneider, 1994).

According to West (2004), the first treatise on portraiture was published in 1548 by Francisco de Holanda. Gombrich (1972), however, argues that the first detailed discussion of the theory of portrait painting was written over one hundred years later by Roger de Piles in 1708.

As historical overviews of the genre suggest, despite its 'Golden Age' ending in 1670 (Schneider, 1994), portraiture as an art form and process has persisted, even under the pressure of early 20th Century modernism when its basis in mimesis, in an assumed relationship between a signifier and signified was disrupted by, for example, 'portraits' by Picasso and Matisse (Buchloh, 1994; Pointon, 1997; van Alphen, 1997; West, 2004). As argued by Buchloh (1994): "the *portrait* as a pictorial category seems to renew itself and its heads...almost instantly after decapitation" (p.53, emphasis in original).

Despite this, what constitutes a 'portrait', and the meanings and evaluative criteria applied to it as a representation of an ostensibly "living or once living person", that is, what constitutes a 'good likeness', has changed within and across time. This reflects not just changes in artistic practices and conventions but in the conceptualisations of, and ways for visually representing (and arguably, constituting) the individual, the self, subjectivity and identity; conceptualisations which are contemporaneous to the production of the portrait as well as historicized readings. As West argues:

"Portraits are not just likenesses, but works of art that engage with ideas of identity as they are perceived, represented, and understood in different times and places." (West, 2004, p.11)

The next sub-section explores some of the parameters and paradoxes that distinguish (or blur) what constitutes a (good) portrait.

¹⁷ For a discussion of the fluidity of meaning attached to profile and full frontal depictions of the human form see, for example, Schapiro (1973). This is also referred to in chapter 6.

3.3 The portrait's paradoxes

3.3.1 The portrait's offer

"So each day, I released a few more inches of the seething cascade of bones...A few wretches were still intact. To these [the artist] hadn't given a great deal of attention; they were no more than fire fodder. All but one. And he, I could have sworn was a portrait – a crescent shaped scar on his brow made this almost certain. His bright hair streamed like a torch...It was the most extraordinary detail of medieval painting that I had ever seen. What in this single detail had pushed him this immense stride beyond his time?" (Carr, 1984, p.60)

The quote above is from a fictional account of a conservator uncovering a medieval fresco in an English country church. The narrator distinguishes between the 'fire fodder' of the damned depicted on their way to hell, and one figure whose particular features stood out to suggest a portrait. This ostensible capacity for painting (or sculpture or other representational media), to depict a human face in a way that is, in Hall's terms, "informative, idiosyncratic and particularized" (Hall, 2014, p.18) such that it provokes in the viewer a sense of a concrete person (with an individual history and 'identity') outwith the picture plane, is fundamental to portrait's specificity. Yet, even within this confine the portrait is marked by a series of paradoxes.

Fundamental to the portrait's specificity is the *intended* relatedness in some way to a concrete external referent: an identified or potentially identifiable (nameable) individual. According to Brilliant, for example, "referentiality...is a basic requirement for portraits" (Brilliant, 2002 [1991], p.125) .

In art historical terms these are 'autonomous' portraits as distinct from images that may use models to depict figures, but where the model is not the intended 'subject' of the image (West, 2004). Thus, although the models for Manet's *Olympia* (discussed in chapter 2) have been identified as Victorine Meurent and Laure (surname unknown) (Pollock, 1999) it is not (in art historical terms) a portrait of these two women. For Gadamer this is the portrait's "occasionality" – that is, the portrait's meaning, particularly its relationship to the person represented, is not solely read into the image, rather:

"The meaning and contents are determined by the occasion for which they are intended...the portrait is related to the man represented, a relation not just dragged in but expressly intended in the portrait itself...this occasionality belongs to the work's own claim and is not something forced on it by its interpreters." (Gadamer, 2006 [1975]), p.138)

In addition to a putative referentiality, the portrait's 'offer' is that it should contain an element of 'likeness' (Woodall, 1997a), yet what constitutes 'likeness' and 'identity', shifts within and across time (West, 2004).

Thus, notwithstanding these two axes of referentiality and resemblance, defining what constitutes a 'portrait' proves to be elusive and shifting. A part of this is the problem of providing an account that is not historicized, or reflects later theoretical interpretations. Woodall (1997a), for example draws attention to, and critiques, dualist conceptions, such as that by the art historian Jacob Burckhardt writing in the mid-nineteenth century. According to Woodall, commentators such as Burckhardt sought to interpret portraiture through the prism of the Cartesian distinction between mind and body and between object-subject and objectivity-subjectivity. This perspective Woodall argues, sanctions and naturalises the ahistorical masculine bourgeois object and field of vision. In its place the contributors to the collection edited by Woodall (1997b) produce their own (late 20th century) interpretations that challenge this dualist conception and the relations of power it reproduces, to present an understanding of the portrayed self as "formulated through relationships between subjectivities which are themselves socially produced" (p.18). In a parallel vein, Pointon (1993) argues for portraits as a discourse:

"A politics of representation in which the historical human subject is not a separate identity from the portrait depiction of him or her, but part of a process through which knowledge is claimed and the social and physical environment is shaped." (p.1)

Thus the 'portrait' as a representational practice, an art object, an image and a ground for interpretation is a "politically invested genre" (van Alphen, 1997).

The following draws attention to some of the complexities of what otherwise could be considered to be one of the most self-evident of genres.

3.3.2 A living or once living person?

As already noted, for Gadamer, (2006 [1975]), the portrait's intended relationship to a concrete individual is what 'occasions' the portrait. In Maynard's (2007) terms the purpose of the portrait is to "display", to make visible in object form a human subject, this is its "intentional affordance". According to Brilliant (1987) "some evident, recognizable connection between the visual image and an actual person is necessary for the artwork to be considered a portrait at all" (p.171).

Seen through this prism, portraits point or draw attention to an existent (or once existent) subject with a "unique essence", even if the portrait sign is not similar to the referent (Steiner, 1978). However illusory or abstract, this referential or 'indexical'¹⁸ connection to a concrete person should create the sense of being in the presence of the subject (Brilliant, 2002 [1991]; Steiner, 1978; West, 2004). Thus, according to Brilliant (2002 [1991]) even when the portrait is "freed from all forms of descriptive reference to physical appearance [it can retain] its categorical status as an intentionally exclusive sign of a named individual" (p.155).

What this also alludes to is the significance not just of a physical presence outwith the portrait, but an individual identifiable by a specific 'name'. As Steiner (1978) suggests, the 'name' may be used to reference both the subject of the artwork and the artwork (see for example Roger Ballen's photograph of 'Dresie and Casie, Twins, Western Transvaal' discussed in chapter 6 below (figure 6.2)). This arguably works to reinforce the assumed equivalence between the representation and its referent. As Fisher (1984) argues, the titles of art works connote as well as denote, that is, they tell the viewer "how

¹⁸ This refers to C.S Pierce's distinction between: the icon which looks like the thing it represents, or stands for its object in virtue of some shared quality; the index, which draws attention to something outside of itself, or denotes some relationship to the image and its referent; and the symbol, a sign, that by convention is connected to a particular object (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/peirce-semiotics/> accessed 23 Nov 2014).

to look at a work" (p.292). In relation to representational portraiture Fisher suggests that the titles say something about the work, the sitter and the artist's intentions. Leaving aside the problem of historical (or even contemporary) portraits where the 'name' is effectively meaningless as an index when a viewer is not aware of the person to whom it putatively refers¹⁹, the title/naming of the work/subject is no guarantor of the concreteness of the relationship between the image and the referent. On the one hand, as Brilliant (2002 [1991]) points out, 'portraits' of 'Homer' and of 'Shakespeare' circulate, despite the fact that the physical existence of the former (let alone 'his' physical form), is unknown, and debates continue about the authenticity of images of the latter.²⁰ In these cases it is not just a case of fitting a name to a face, but finding a face to fit a 'name'. On the other hand, two 'portraits' by Roy Lichtenstein, painted in 1962, demonstrate the fluid, if not wholly arbitrary relationship between face and name. The two images represent an identical man in a jacket and bow tie in Lichtenstein's trademark 'cartoon' style; one is entitled 'portrait of Allan Kaprow', the second is called 'portrait of Ivan Karp'.²¹

The assumed indexical relationship between the image and a named external referent – portraiture's "mimetic referentiality" (van Alphen, 1997) - perhaps reaches its apotheosis with photographic portraiture, where the chemical production process of analogue photography itself implies an external presence; in Barthes' terms, *'the thing has been there'* (2000 [1980], p.76). Mimetic representation in general, and photography's specific claims to

¹⁹ In response to a comment that his portraits of the Medici were not a good likeness, Michelangelo is reported to have responded "what will it matter in a thousand years time what these men looked like?" (cited in Gombrich, 1972, p.2). This suggests too that the balance between the aesthetic and the referential in portraiture (Steiner, 1978) may shift over time and space, as the recognition of the subject recedes and the 'art' takes prominence.

²⁰ In March/April 2009, for example, the proposal that a painting known as the Cobbe Portrait was a contemporary portrait of Shakespeare and a more 'authentic' likeness than other extant portraits generated media debate. See for example:

<http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2009/mar/10/shakespeare-cobbe-portrait> (accessed 14 Nov 2014) A similar debate emerged in May 2015, with the discovery of yet another image claimed to be an 'authentic' likeness (<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2015/may/20/the-shakespeare-code-garden-book-portrait-discovery-art-symbols> (accessed 24 May 2015).

²¹ Both of the 'named' people are concrete individuals. Allan Kaprow, was a performance artist who coined the term a 'happening'; Ivan Karp was an art dealer instrumental in the emergence of Pop Art.

capture an objective external reality, have been subject to extensive analysis as part of wider critiques of realist epistemologies which would argue for an unmediated access to the 'real' beyond representation. It is not possible to adjudicate between or to do justice to these arguments here, but what commentators such as Tagg (1988) and Hand (2012), for example, argue in the context of photographic representation is that objective reality is not revealed by photography but, at the level of meaning, discursively produced and ideological in form - that is, the "rhetoric of indexicality" (Tagg, 1988), has effects of power. This line of critique also has implications for issues of 'authenticity', both of the image and the subject of the image - which are examined further in the following case studies.

Late 20th Century examples of *explicitly* 'imaginary' portraiture could perhaps be read as a way of acknowledging critiques of both the capacity to access an unmediated external reality and the fixity of identity. The photographic work of Cindy Sherman, such as her 'Untitled Film Stills' from the 1970s in which she 'plays' female characters from fictional films might come within this category (Jones, 2006; van Alphen, 1997; West, 2004).²² It might also encompass the work of Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, shortlisted for the 2013 Turner prize on the basis of her "imaginary" portraits of black subjects.

Given that the referentiality of the portrait has been brought under pressure, what of the portrait's second, and linked axis, that of 'resemblance'?

3.3.3 'Leal Souvenir' (loyal remembrance)²³

"...Portraits are images of persons that fulfil one or more of the following features: 1. Likenesses; 2. Psychological characterizations; 3. Proofs of presence or 'contact'; 4. Manifestations of a person's 'essence' or 'air'."
(Freeland, 2010, p.49)

²² It should be noted that Freeland (2010) argues that Sherman's works are not 'portraits' in the sense that they do not use the portrait form "from an interest in probing the nature of the person" (p.267).

²³ Inscription on a portrait by van Eyck (Tymotheos), 1432 (in Schneider, 1994, p.13).

"If personhood were not to have a separate, distinct existence, or if it cannot be properly demonstrated, then nothing but an arbitrary connection between an image, qua portrait and some named individual need be represented."
(Brilliant, 2002 [1991], p.171)

Such is the strong assumed relationship between the subject of the image and his or her visual representation, that the perceived quality of the image qua image is at risk of being overshadowed by the perceived quality with which the image is considered a good 'likeness' of the external referent. According to Woodall, for Aristotle, for example, portraiture epitomised representation in the sense of making present again, the pleasure of the portrait residing in "the process of identifying a likeness with what it is perceived to be like, of substituting something present for something absent" (Woodall, 1997a, p.8).²⁴

But the nature of this 'likeness' captured pictorially slips and slides between a reflection of a physical, exterior likeness – a mimetic reproduction of the individual – and, or, the capturing of an inner essence, something that goes beyond the surface features of an individual. Sousslof (2006) describes this as the "functional dialectic" in portraiture between, on the one hand, "the truth claims of an indexical exteriority or resemblance" and the claim to represent an interiority or spirituality; the essence or "'air' [that] expresses the subject" (Barthes, 2000 [1980], p.109). The emergence of this 'dialectic', evident too from accounts of the term's etymology, draws attention to the reciprocal relationships between aesthetic codes and conventions, the technology of representation, changing social relations, including the status of the artist from the 15th Century, and conceptualisations of self, identity and individuality drawn from contemporary and subsequent Western metaphysics and philosophy. It is about reproducing the specificity of an individual, their 'identity' or 'likeness', in a context in which what these concepts mean and how they are articulated in and through artistic representations at any one point in time are historically specific and ideologically determined (Pointon, 1993; West, 2004).

²⁴ In his analysis of 'The Imaginary', Sartre (2004 [1940]), for example, compares the different means for conjuring up the image of his absent friend 'Pierre': "*mental representation, photograph, caricature: three very different realities appear... From beginning to end, the aim is the same: to make present the face of Pierre, who is not there.*" (p.18)

As already noted, however, without going back to historical sources it is difficult to uncouple whether the assumed shifts in emphases reflect the mutual constitution of contemporaneous ideas and images or later constructions of intellectual and aesthetic reciprocity. Further, while attempting to illustrate shifts over time it is acknowledged that any one 'period' will contain multiple, co-existing images that may suggest other narratives.

With these caveats in mind, what an art historical overview suggests is that from the 15th Century to at least the 19th Century portraiture has been marked by three key antinomies. First, between a concept of 'likeness' as 'type', an abstracted view of likeness, relating to social role, such as early monarchical portraiture, where the focus may be on symbols or insignia of authority, rather than on veracity of physical appearance²⁵, and 'likeness' in the sense of being to some degree a 'copy' of the sitter's external features.

Second, between a representation of the subject's 'ideal qualities' to "emphasise the dignity and grandeur of the human being, suppressing Nature's irregularities" (Lomazzo, writing in 1584, quoted in Schneider, 1994), and transcending "the coarseness of living bodies" (Vasari, c1568, quoted in Berger, (1994)), to a 'warts and all'²⁶ representation of an individual.²⁷

Third, between a focus on the sitter's external features versus the face as an index of the mind, that is the artist's skill in capturing or revealing the inner essence or 'air' of the individual. This emphasis on the assumed revelatory (as opposed to solely 'documentary') capacity of the portrait, is, however, not immanent to the portrait, but historically specific, associated with the social and political emergence, from the 15th Century, of the bourgeois 'individual'.

²⁵ See, for example, the Ditchley Portrait of Elizabeth 1 painted by Marcus Gheeraerts the younger c.1592 <http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw02079/Queen-Elizabeth-I-The-Ditchley-portrait> (accessed 2 Nov 2014).

²⁶ The paraphrase of an expression attributed (by Horace Walpole in 1764) to Oliver Cromwell to his portraitist Peter Lely.

²⁷ Similar shifts are described by Daston and Galison (1992) in relation to scientific images. Again this parallel could be a fruitful area for further exploration.

Conceptualised as unitary, monocular or 'perspectival' the external form is the signifier of the unique, individual essence (van Alphen (1997). Van Alphen, for example, argues that the "bourgeois self depends on a specific mode of representation for its authenticity" (1997 p.241) and that it is precisely this "belief' in the unity of the signified and signifier that mimetic representation affords which authorises the originality or uniqueness of both the subject and the artist.

Theoretical critiques (philosophical, psychoanalytical, social and political) from at least the late 19th Century of the unitary, centred subject (Hall, 2004), are seen as being mirrored in 20th and 21st Century portraits. These are read as disrupting the assumed connection between signifier and signified or as articulating the fragmented and decentred self (Buchloh, 1994; Jones, 2006; van Alphen, 1997). The portrait, in effect, becomes an intellectual and aesthetic vehicle for exploring, articulating and exposing the ideological function of the unitary self. As summarised by Feldman (1994), the "human image becomes a pawn for [artists'] formal and epistemological investigations" (p.10).

So, for example, early 20th Century 'modernist' portraits by Picasso and Matisse have been described as replacing the mimetic 'mirror', with the "multiple values of the mask" (Solana and Potts, 2007), even as they retain some elements of 'resemblance' to the sitters (see also, Buchloh, 1994; Bürger, 2008 [2006]; Feaver, 2007; Klein, 2001, 2007; Pointon, 1997; van Alphen, 1997; West, 2004).

Later in the 20th Century the serial portraits of 'celebrities' by Andy Warhol, have been interpreted as "vacating" both the sitter's and the artist's subjectivity (Buchloh, 1994; van Alphen, 1997). Thus, for Buchloh (1994), the work of Warhol (and Lichtenstein) is "not only emptied of all individuality of painterly performance but of any remnants of interiority and privacy of the self as sitter" (p.62). Through this prism, the works are seen as representing the self reduced to 'simulacrum' (Baudrillard, 1984), to surface without depth (Buchloh, 1994; Foster, 2012; Moorhouse, 2007; Steiner, 1987;

van Alphen, 1997). While, on the one hand, interpreted as a critique of the commodification of the self in late-capitalist consumer society (Buchloh, 1994; Foster, 2012), as Klein (2007), notes, this emphasis on surface over depth returns the focus in the portrait to “where it all began”.

The fragmentation of the self, the breaking down of the bourgeois sealed off *homo clausus* (Elias, 1994 [1939]) and Cartesian distinction between mind and body (Woodall, 1997a) has also opened on to a ‘post-modern’ portraiture of the abject and the ‘grotesque’, and a focus on the ‘body’ rather than the head/face (Erdrich, 2007; Feldman, 1994; Jones, 2006; Meskimmon, 1996; Warr and Jones, 2000; West, 2004). Associated with feminist self-portraiture (but not exclusively so, see, for example, chapter 6 below), it brings into the portrait’s frame not just bodies which “force us to question the designations of beauty in relationship to the grotesque” (Erdrich, 2007, p.48, on the work of Jenny Saville), but also ‘sitters’ who are otherwise excluded from formal portraiture (such as Nan Goldin’s images of the New York counter-culture). It also draws attention to the ‘performative’ nature of portraiture. Jones (2006), for example, in her discussion of photographic self-portraiture describes, the emergence of “an exaggerated mode of performative self-imaging that opens up an entirely new way of thinking about photography and the racially, sexually and gender-identified subject” (p.40).

The concept of the ‘performative’ is used not only in relation to readings of contemporary portraiture, which may be influenced by, for example, the theoretical thinking of Judith Butler (1993; 2006 [1990]), but also in relation to interpretations of historical portraiture to describe a conscious ‘self-fashioning’ (Greenblatt, 1980) of visual ‘identity’. Berger (1994), for example, seeks to replace what he describes as ‘*physiognomic*’ interpretations of Early Modern (Renaissance) portraiture that attempt to read the face of the sitter as an index of the mind, with a theory of “posing”. This seeks to recuperate the role of the sitter and the act of portrayal in the production of a self-representation. What the image presents is not the representation of an inner life, but a performance of an inner life, fabricated for an anticipated observer;

not the face as an index of the mind, but the mind's capacity to make the face an index of the mind:

"The portrait creates a referential illusion. What it pretends only to reflect and refer to is in fact something that it constitutes. Thus it represents the three-way diachronic transaction between painter, sitter and observer in a purely fictional field." (Berger, 1994, p.99)

This sense of the knowing construction of identity is also indirectly alluded to in Maynard's (2007) analysis of portraits as display, that is as images not only intended to make their subjects visible, but for this intent to be recognised; they are depictions of people in the act of displaying themselves and aware of being looked at and being seen.²⁸ Although accompanied by a sense of dismay this also resonates with Barthes' account of the experience of being photographed:

"I constitute myself in the process of 'posing'...I transform myself in advance into an image...I lend myself to the social game, I pose, I know I am posing, I want you to know that I am posing...'myself' never coincides with my image." (Barthes, 2000 [1980], p.10–12)

For Pointon (1997), what defines portraiture is this oscillation between the fictitious and the referential:

"It is this coming together of the blatantly fictitious and the empirically truthful that epitomises the double-edged quality of portraiture." (p.193)

It should, however, be noted that, from different perspectives, both the theorising of a decentred self, and its implications for portraiture have themselves been subject to critique. Freeland (2010), for example, rejects the idea of the "fallen self" and argues that an analysis of portraits that appear to articulate this fall or disappearance, such as those by Warhol and Gerhard Richter, reveals that they retain more of the 'traditional self', a self with "autonomy and responsibility", than meets the eye. From a different

²⁸ Parallels can perhaps be drawn here with Cooley's (1956 [1902]) concept of the "looking glass self", which extends beyond the "mere mechanical reflection of ourselves", to encompass "an imputed sentiment, the imagined effect of this reflection upon another's mind" (p.184).

perspective, the argument has been made by those traditionally excluded from portraiture, such as black artists and sitters (Doy, 2002; Gabara, 2004; Pointon, 2013), that the concept of the decentred self may work to further disadvantage and exclude female and black artists. Doy cites Hartsock (1990) who asks:

"Why is that just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, then just then the concept of subjecthood becomes problematic?" (p.163)

In this context, Doy (2002) argues that women and black artists want to preserve the self-subject situated "in community where dialogue and interaction takes place" (p.43; see also hooks, 1990).

3.3.4 The (loss of) face

"It simply is a fact about humans that we are visual animals with a strong interest in identifying and re-identifying the faces of others. This is so important that a part of our brains is actually hardwired for the task. And other brain parts are geared toward recognizing the facial expression of emotions." (Freeland, 2010, p.189)

"[What] Rembrandt...intends to show us above all is our powerlessness in the 'face' of physiognomies. A face, he will demonstrate, is a machine for exteriorising – exchanging, universalising – subjectivity...This is what the arrangement of nose, ears, eyes, cheeks, mouth and chin...was evolved to do: to make the sensory apparatus of each individual respond to the apparatus of others; to make the 'features' into signs." (Clark, 2014, np)

As already touched upon, as a corollary to the shifting perceptions of 'likeness' and 'resemblance', is the shifting significance of the face as the index of the subject's identity (physical or otherwise).²⁹

As illustrated in the quote from Freeland (2010) above, biological or psychological theories have been drawn on to account for why "faces figure

²⁹ Social theorists have also drawn on the metaphor of the face; Deleuze and Guattari's (1988 [1980]), concept of 'faciality', for example (see Bogue, 2003) and the concept of the 'visage' in Levinas (see Davis, 2004).

so prominently in the history of visual portraiture” (p.188). Brilliant (2002 [1991]), for example, argues that portraiture’s significance may in fact stem from the need at an early stage for a child to recognise its mother’s face for its survival^{30,31}. Gombrich (1972), in his analysis of “the perception of physiognomic likeness in life and in art” (p.1), explores the issue of portrait likeness, or ‘physiognomic constancy’ from the perspective of perceptual psychology. For Simmel (1959 [1901]) what gives the face its “aesthetic significance” is its capacity to merge “such a great variety of shapes and surfaces into an absolute unity of meaning” (p.277). Furthermore, Simmel argues, it achieves this through an “aesthetic synthesis” of “anti-individualistic” symmetry and individuality:

“As a whole, it [the face] realizes individualization; but it does so in the form of symmetry, which controls the relations among the parts.” (Simmel (1959 [1901], p.280)

It is, however, physiognomy, based as it is on the premise that a person’s ‘character’ or ‘soul’ can be read from their physical features, which has the longest history in accounting for the significance of the face. Although described as an “ancient science” (Gage, 1997), the first attempt to codify the ‘semantic’ possibilities of facial appearance, or what Clark (2014) alludes to as the brain’s capacity to “make the ‘features’ into signs”, is Charles le Bruin’s *A Method to Learn to Design the Passions*, published in 1667. Drawing on Descartes’ account of the ‘passions’ and their external signs, Le Bruin attempted the first systematic study of human expression. The book became a standard manual for painters for over 100 years (Freeland, 2010; Gombrich,

³⁰ Lacan’s conceptualisations of the ‘mirror stage’ and the ‘screen’ have also been called upon as ways of theorizing and interpreting portraiture (see for example, Meskimmon, 1996; Sousslof, 2006). It is through the ‘mirror stage’ that a young child comes to (mis)-recognize itself as an individual subject or self – that is as a “specular self”, even as it feels powerless and fragmented (Hall, 2004; Lacan, 1977 [1949]). The development of this stage is preparatory to the recognition of the other, that is to becoming a “social I”. The ‘mirror stage’ is used by Lacan both to describe an observed phenomenon of infant development and as a metaphor for the construction of the subject. The Lacanian concept of the ‘screen’ (Lacan, 1981 [1964]) describes the process by which we are self-constituted and constituted in relation to the gaze of others, The Other (see for example, Erdrich, 2007; Foster, 1996; Jones, 2006).

³¹ The significance of facial recognition cannot be explored here, but see for example, Peterson and Rhodes (eds) 2006; Tistarelli et al (2007).

1972). Over the period 1789 – 1792 the theologian Johann Casper Lavater published his *Essays on Physiognomy*, in which he set out a system for interpreting character from physical characteristics. In 1806 the Scottish anatomist and surgeon Charles Bell published his *Anatomy of Expression in Painting* which included his own drawings of faces expressing different emotional states or expressions. His work was also influential on artists and, according to Freeland (2010), on Charles Darwin.

The thread connecting this historical meshing of the ‘scientific’, ‘aesthetic’ and ‘moral’ is the assumption that the portrayed face reflects not just identity in terms of physical features, but can be ‘read’ as an index of something beneath, whether articulated as ‘soul’, ‘passions’, ‘moral character’ or ‘emotion’. The use of the face/physical features as a ‘sign’ of moral or ethical worth, which underpinned the work of Lavater in particular, is described as having had a “pernicious” influence on Kant, who perpetuated the racial and ethnic stereotypes to which Lavater’s physiognomic influence lent itself (Freeland, 2010). Gage also draws attention to the work of Francis Galton (the “father of eugenics” (Gage, 1997)) who, in the late 19th Century, attempted to codify ‘types’ through the development of composite photographs made by superimposing photographic negatives. He began with photographs of prisoners with a view to developing a taxonomy of criminal ‘types’, that is, identifying facial ‘likeness’ as a form of social control (see also Edwards, 1990; Tagg, 1988. See also chapter 6 below).

In the 20th and 21st century the primacy given to ‘face’ has been challenged *within* portraiture, and as a challenge *to* portraiture. This has been either through the absence of face and/or through a focus on the ‘body’.

Brilliant (2002 [1991]), for example, draws attention to portraits in which the ‘subject’ is reduced to just a few “physiognomic characteristics”, (as in Salvador Dali’s representation of Mae West), or where there is no immediate relationship between object and image and the connection is textual rather than one of physical ‘likeness’ (as in Francis Picabia’s “Portrait of Marie Laurencin”). For Brilliant, although reflecting the artist’s vision of the

subject, rather than a descriptive reference, such images retain their categorical status as portraits understood as “intentionally exclusive sign[s] of a named person” (Brilliant, 2002 [1991], p.155).

According to Buchloh (1994) among post Second World War (American) avant-garde artists, however, the aim of non-objective representation was not to perpetuate but to “undo the category at all costs”. The “signal gesture”, for Buchloh, was Robert Rauschenberg’s 1961 telegram mailed to his dealer with the text: *“This is a portrait of Iris Clert if I say so. Robert Rauschenberg”*. For Buchloh (1998), this both:

“Shifts the representation of subjectivity into the register of the performative declaration...but...also asserts that the very principle of subjectivity is one of instantiation and iteration...the subject as a continuous performative process.” (p.157, emphasis in original)

The loss of face, in effect, signals not only a change in representational practice but also the parallel shift (discussed earlier) in conceptualisations of subjectivity itself. This extends into 1960’s and 1970’s Pop Art, in which, for Buchloh (1994; 1998), the “refusal of the genre” is expressed as an absence of people, or a vacating of subjectivity altogether. Using the imagery of the comic strip, Lichtenstein, for example, produced a series of ‘self portraits’, in which the ‘head’ or ‘face’ is replaced either by a mirror above an empty t-shirt or a piece of plywood, or perforated Swiss cheese (Buchloh, 1994).

In her discussion of the portraiture of late 20th Century ‘post modern’ artists, West (2004), describes what she sees as a shift from the “iconic properties” of portraits, to “indexical ones”³², that is, away from artists portraying themselves or others in a representational way, toward a referential allusion (not dissimilar to the early 20th Century images by Picabia and Dali described by Brilliant (2002 [1991])). West cites the example of Tracy Emin’s work, *Everyone I have ever slept with 1963 – 1995* (1995), a tent, including mattress and light, with the appliqued names of all the people Emin had shared a bed

³² See footnote 18 above for a summary of Pierce’s distinction between the ‘icon’, ‘index’ and ‘symbol’.

with up to that point.³³ According to West (2004) this work is self-referential but avoids the emphasis on the (assumed) relationship between a *physical likeness* and character.

If one response to (or articulation of) the de-stabilising of subjectivity is to de-face the portrait, the other response has been to look away from the face to the body. As already alluded to, as part of a feminist political critique of the unitary bourgeois subjectivity, and associated masculinist and heterosexist aesthetics of (female) beauty (see, for example, Berger 1972; Brand and Korsmeyer, 1995; Duncan, 1993 [1973]; Jones, 2002, 2006; Meskimmon, 1996; Nochlin, 1999; Pollock, 2003 [1988]) the focus in women's self-portraiture for example, has not just shifted from the face to the body, but the subversive "monstrous" or "grotesque" body (Erdrich, 2007; Jones, 2006; Meskimmon, 1996; Ross, 1997; Russo, 1994). West (2004) also draws attention to the work of (male) artists such as Chuck Close and Bruce Nauman which aims to objectify body parts, and hence de-familiarise the image. It could also include the work of John Coplans, whose series of self-portraits comprised his own (aging) naked body. Hammer (2007) notes of Coplans' work:

"Although the titles inform us that the artist himself is the model, the head, the primary indicator of inner states and personal identity, is the one element that is always left out." (p.90)

3.3.5 'Being' portrayed

Perhaps because of the complexity and ambiguity of what the portrait 'captures' it has become a site on which ontological questions have been played out. Gadamer, for example, argues that portraits contribute to an increase of being: "What is represented comes into its own in the picture. It experiences an increase in being" (Gadamer, 2006 [1975], p.146). Jones (2006), in her discussion of technologies of self-representation, however, argues that while these may "condition[...] our experience of ourselves...[they] can never fully contain or explain the depths of embodied

³³ The work itself was destroyed in a warehouse fire in 2004.

human experience" (p.40). While these authors suggest the potential for the portrait to increase, or fail to fully capture 'being', for Barthes (as touched upon earlier), photographic portraits mortify the self:

"The Photograph (the one I intend) represents that very subtle moment, when to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object, but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death...what I see is that I have become Total-Image, which is to say, Death in person." (Barthes, 2000 [1980], p.14)

For Tagg (1988) though, (in his critique of Barthes assumptions regarding the indexical nature of photography), the self neither dies, escapes or increases through representation, but is effectively produced through and by representation:

"What exceeds representation...cannot, by definition be articulated. More than this, it is an effect of the production of the subject in and through representation to give rise to the phantasy of this something more." (1988, p.4).

Again it is not possible here to do justice to these arguments, but perhaps even more than the other dimensions discussed these examples serve to capture the portrait's fugitive qualities, its capacity to offer up readings, while at the same time denying closure or fixity.

3.4 The portrait's transaction

Underpinning the dimensions of 'likeness' discussed above, is portraiture's distinctive (and socially and historically dynamic) transactional quality: in the relationship between artist and sitter; between image and spectator; and as a business transaction and communal enterprise (Pointon, 1993). Relations of power, including, for example, on the basis of class, gender, race and sexual orientation, mediate each dimension. The artist-sitter relationship, for example, reflects the changing social status of the painter – from 'craftsman' (sic) to 'artist' and the social status (e.g. class, gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality) of the person portrayed as well as the personal relationship between artist and sitter (Berger, 2001a, 2001b; Rosenthal, 1997; West, 2004). The relationship also informs who has control over the way an

image is realized, to flatter or idealize, for example, or to stress signs of “ugliness and extremes” (West, 2004, p.38). As Pointon (2013) notes, “the power to impose a shape on oneself is an aspect of the more general power to control identity” (p.61). This factor may be related to the ‘ownership’ of the product, that is whether the sitter commissions the portrait or where they are used primarily as a model for expressing an artistic idea. In addition is the complex relationship between the socially and historically situated (and constituted) ‘observer’ (Crary, 1992), and the image both as an ‘art’ work, and as the representation of another socially and historically situated (and constituted) human subject (Pointon, 1993). As will be discussed in the context of the case study images below, this can result in a ‘flip flop’ between an evaluation of the image qua ‘art’, and an evaluation of the imaged qua social subject.

The following examines the purposes and production of portraiture as a product or commodity. A number of these themes are explored in more depth in the case studies.

3.4.1 The subject in the portrait: Who is (and is not) portrayed

“The production of portraits is, at once, the production of significations in which contending social classes claim presence in representation, and the production of things which may be possessed...the rise of the photographic portrait...belongs to a particular stage of social evolution: the rise of the middle and lower classes towards greater social, economic and political importance...To ‘have one’s portrait done’, was one of the symbolic acts by which individuals from the rising social classes made their ascent visible to themselves and others.” (Tagg, 1988, p.37)

As the quote from Tagg above underlines, the ‘who’ (and who is not) in the portrait reflects changing social and power structures and the development of new technologies and practices of representation. As a result, historically the social position of those portrayed has changed over time. Summarising this very crudely, from being primarily representations of monarchical and aristocratic patrons (and power), from around the 15th Century, the genre expands to include portraits (individual, family, group) of the rising bourgeoisie, and from the mid 19th Century, with the development and

commercialisation of photographic portraiture, the rising lower and middle classes (Tagg, 1988). The 20th and 21st Century sees, on the one hand, a burgeoning of ‘celebrity’ portraiture (see chapter 7 below). On the other, as part of the critique and fracturing of the bourgeois subject, this period also sees the representation and self-representation in portraiture by and of those previously excluded from the picture plane or who, historically, have been represented as the pacified, racialised, sexualised or exoticised ‘other’ (Brilliant, 2002 [1991]; Gabara, 2004), or the ‘monologic’ object of knowledge (Edwards, 1990; Tagg, 1988).³⁴ As part of this attempt, by and on the part of the ‘subaltern subject’ (Murray and Murray, 2006) to (re)claim their own “presence in representation” (Tagg, 1988), the portrait has been used as a site for asserting and shaping identity by women (see, for example, Doy, 2002; Erdrich, 2007; Garb, 2007; Jones, 2006; Meskimmon, 1996; Posner, 1998), black artists and sitters and those subject to colonial conquest (Doy, 2002; Gabara, 2004; Jones, 2006), and by others who transgress the ‘normative’ (Bourguignon, 2000; Çakırlar, 2011; Gutiérrez-Albilla, 2008). The implications of this move within portraiture and its potential capacity to be both subversive and subverted are discussed further in chapter 6.

3.4.2 The portrait artist

Running in parallel has been the shift in the social status of the artist, and with it control over the image. As suggested earlier, the development from (at least) the 15th Century, of an increased self-consciousness is accompanied by the emergence both of the ‘autonomous’ portrait and the (quasi) autonomous, professional artist, undertaking commissions from a broadening range of sitters (West, 2004). As a number of commentators note, what emerges from the transaction between artist and sitter is a negotiated image, reflecting contemporary aesthetic conventions and codes for representing ‘likeness’, the artist’s “intentions” and means of expression

³⁴ There is a history of portraits of what West (2004) describes as “the unknown and the underclass” such as portraits of servants, slaves, the ‘insane’ and ethnographic portraiture. For critiques of these representations of ‘otherness’ (West, 2004) see, for example, Best (2011) and Pointon (2013) on slave portraiture; Brilliant (2002 [1991]) and Gabara (2004) on the implications of the ethnographic gaze; and, for examples and commentaries on images of madness, Gilman (1982), Klein (1998), Kromm (1985, 1987) and Sullivan (1977).

(Maynard, 2007), and the sitter's "individual requirements" (Schneider, 1994). From the late 19th Century and early 20th Century, accounts suggest a significant shift in the balance of power toward the artist and away from the sitter. The early 20th Century is seen as a period when portraiture "broke free" (Alarcó and Warner, 2007) from the traditional 'contract' between artist and sitter. In place of concerns with producing a 'good likeness' and with mimetic representation, artists used sitters (including from their own social circle and families) as 'motifs' through which to explore their own psyches or formal concerns (West, 2004). Portraits that are felt to be key in signalling this shift are Picasso's portraits of the author and collector Gertrude Stein (1906), and of his dealer, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler (1910). The former, with its "mask" like face drawing on Iberian art (Brilliant, 2002 [1991]; Giroud, 2007) was criticised at the time for not looking like Stein. According to Brilliant, however, the image articulates Picasso's capacity for "Analytical verisimilitude...[he] was able to see and paint her as she was and would be" (Brilliant, 2002 [1991], p. 152).³⁵ Picasso's cubist image of his dealer, described as "one of the great icons of modernism" (Pointon, 1997), is the point at which, according to Brilliant:

"Picasso's analysis of the formal properties of Cubism took precedence over the manifest recognisability of the subject, and the artist's gaze was clearly the focus of representation." (Brilliant, 2002 [1991], p.152)

This shift arguably pushes the boundaries of what constitutes an image as a portrait. Pointon, for example, suggests that although viewers "struggle" to "recognise" Kahnweiler in the image:

"It is not...resemblance or likeness that persuades us that Picasso's canvas represents Kahnweiler...we must depend upon naming, upon conventions...and upon the intervention of Kahnweiler's voice to realise the image as portrait." (Pointon, 1997, p.196)

³⁵ As Stein herself said: *"for me, it is I, and it is the only reproduction of me which is always I, for me."* (quoted in Giroud, 2007, p.30)

In other words, the portrait comes to be constituted not (just) by its content, but the extra-aesthetic context in which it is located – a theme that will be returned to throughout the following chapters.

3.4.3 The artist as portrait

Self-portraiture has a long history; Hall (2014) for example, begins his ‘cultural history’ of the sub-genre from the middle ages, but draws attention to its foundations in antiquity. As an art object the self-portrait has served a number of functions: a means of advertising the artist’s skill; of reinforcing the artist’s status; and an opportunity to experiment with form. In addition, it provides artists with an opportunity to explore issues of identity, a means for “rendering...the self in and through technology” (Jones, 2006, p. xviii), untrammelled by the complexities of the two-person artist-sitter transaction (Freeland, 2010). Freeland (2010) argues that the self-portrait gives artists “more freedom to capture both what they see and what they want to project about the inner self” (p.156). Self-portraiture is, therefore, something of a special case, in which the artist is both subject and object of the work (Cummings, 2009; Freeland, 2010; Hall, 2014).

According to Cummings (2009), self-portraiture “remakes” the subject into an “indivisible trinity”: the work of art; the image of the artist/creator and what they believe or sense about themselves; and how they choose to present themselves. This capacity to “render”, explore, and to construct, or “self-fashion” an identity in and as a work of art (Cummings, 2009), may be a contributory factor in artists use of self-portraiture as a tool to explore their psychological states and the complexity of identity and autobiography (West, 2004). In particular, as noted above, it has been used to expose and challenge the white male hegemonic gaze, including by women, black and gay artists.

As a number of authors have noted, however, for these artists “to produce meaning, they must use the dominant codes” even if they use them in “alternative ways” (Meskimmon, 1996). In order for these “alternative ways” not to perpetuate the objectification of the subject of the portrait Doy (2002) argues that it requires women and black self-portraitists to undertake

a “complex negotiation” between “objectifying (making an object through labour) and subjectifying (allowing the subject to become visible)” (p.49).

It also implies that viewers too read these images in “alternative ways”. As both Doy (2002) and Gabara (2004) note (and as Barthes (1997 [1968]) argues), works are open to different meanings on the part of the (socially and historically located) viewer – meanings that may not correspond to the artists’ meanings.

The next sub-section explores the “imaginary transaction” (Brilliant, 2002 [1991]) between the viewer and the portrait/portrayed.

3.4.4 The viewer’s share

“Making portraits is a very purposeful activity; it is undertaken with the viewer in mind...the portraitist always has to keep someone other than the subject in mind.” (Brilliant, 2002 [1991], p.40)

“I see another.” (Sousslof, 2006, p.120)

At the micro level of the production of the art object the foregoing has drawn attention to three of the portrait’s transactional or intra- and intersubjective dimensions. First, the subject of the portrait (whether the artist him or her self or another ‘sitter’), and their capacity for ‘self-fashioning’, that is to attempt to present themselves as they wish to be seen (Berger, 1994; Maynard, 2007). Second, is the role of the artist, drawing on, developing (or actively subverting) historical and socially specific conventions and codes or ‘schema’ of representation (Brilliant, 2002 [1991]; Gombrich, 1980), including, the codes which constitute the genre ‘portraiture’. Third, the relationship between sitter and artist, including the relations of power that may determine or influence whether, and how, the subject is portrayed. The fourth dimension is the viewer of the image, located within a social and historical context that will not necessarily (and perhaps rarely) be contemporaneous with the context of production.

For Nancy (2006), “the portrait is a painting organized around a figure” (p.221), there is, however, an argument for saying that, in a number of respects the portrait is a painting (or photograph, or sculpture etc.) that is (also) organized around an implied ‘spectator’. The viewer is the putative ‘beholder’, for whom the ‘sitter’ (and artist) ‘performs’, but they also have a constitutive role. First, the viewer contributes to the ‘recognition’ of the image as a ‘portrait’. Second, by projection or imputation, it is the viewer who also contributes to the ‘recognition’ (or denial) of the subject(ivity) of the portrayed. As Sousslof (2006) suggests, the concern with ‘recognition’ (as opposed to “absolute identification”) turns the issue of resemblance into a matter of viewing, rather than something that resides solely within the portrait. Assumptions of interiority or essence are, as Sousslof (2006) also argues, a projection from the viewer, rather than imminent to the portrait. While this “beholder’s share” (Gombrich, 1980) may draw on the viewer’s own experience, this experience is socially and historically located. This also influences the viewer’s capacity for evaluation: of the portrait qua ‘art’ object, of the subject of the portrait and the subjectivity of the portrayed. As is discussed below, particularly in chapter 6, ‘recognition’ of the ‘art’ can be accompanied by a ‘misrecognition’ (Honneth, 2004; Sayer, 2005), or denial of the person-hood of the subject of the art. Thus, for Sousslof (2006), while the portrait can be based on an ‘ethics’ dependent on recognition, identification and resemblance, it can also generate misrecognition, assimilation and illegibility.

3.5 ‘The Face Business’³⁶: The portrait as product

To act as a counter to the more abstract accounts of the tension between mimesis and essence discussed earlier, Pointon (1993) suggests that while acknowledging the “mystery of characterization” in a Gainsborough portrait:

“We should be aware that the conditions in which the artist worked, his preoccupations and practical anxieties were often no more directed toward character and personality than towards satisfying the more prosaic demands of the genre.” (p.47)

³⁶ Thomas Gainsborough quoted in Gage (1997).

This section draws attention to some of the more “prosaic demands” of the portrait as a product or commodity. Focusing first on the functions of the portrait, it touches on the different media of production and reproduction and practices of circulation and display.

3.5.1 The portrait’s ‘purposes’

“Aesthetic value – the perceived quality of the portrait as a skilful, inventive or beautiful work of art – has only rarely been the primary inspiration in the commissioning, display and reception of portraits.” (West, 2004, p.44)

Because of its slippery quality between ‘art’ and document, it is perhaps not surprising, as West notes, that the functions of the portrait have tended to take precedence over the form. In addition to their (secondary) purpose as works of art, portraits have, in fact, had a number of different functions (or uses). At an intimate level the ‘talismanic’ quality of portraits (Schneider, 1994; West, 2004), their capacity to stand (in) for the person portrayed, to make the absent present, has meant that portraits have functioned as, or substitutes for, the person.³⁷ Miniatures or paintings of intimates could be used as tokens of affection or gifts, or as an exchange between potential intimates when, historically, used in marriage negotiations. Simons (1997), describing Early Modern images of men, for example, describes how ‘friendship portraiture’ functioned as a record of male homosocial bonds, representing physical closeness and complex links amongst men, including between the sitter(s), viewers and artist.

Relatedly, the portrait can also function as a memorial or commemoration, “preserving the likeness of men after their deaths’ (Schneider, 1994, paraphrasing Dürer), or, in West’s terms, providing both “a trace of a body and a stimulus to memory” (2004, p.65). As noted earlier, it has been suggested that the origin of the portrait can be found in funerary imagery, including, for example, Ancient Roman wax effigies (Schneider, 1994; West, 2004). These were subsequently replaced by more durable marble statuary,

³⁷ See also section 3.3.3 above.

which, according to Pointon (1993), became the root form of depictions of the human head.

The less positive face of this substitutive power of the portrait is illustrated by the destruction or defacement of the image when an individual falls from grace. This may be in the context of a personal relationship (Pointon, 1997), or when the authority of a powerful figure is challenged, for example the destruction of statues of political figures or the defacement of hoardings (Brilliant, 2002 [1991]; Schneider, 1994).

More problematic is the portrait's function as biography and document. The idea that a portrait can be an effective medium for imparting information about an individual's life was common from at least the 16th Century onwards, reflected in the use of portrait illustrations to accompany written accounts. Documentary implies both a contemporaneous account of events as evidentiary proof, as well as material subsequently used as historical 'data'. With regard to the former, Schneider (1994) argues that portraits painted between the 15th Century and the end of the 17th Century should be seen in the context of the development of empiricism. Their apparent "underlying rationalistic impulse" reinforced by the demand for portraits to be "true to life and the subjects' verifiable, criteria...derived from the practicalities of 'rational' Roman Law" (Schneider, 1994, p.26). One manifestation of the use of portraits as historical material might be the 'Grangerized' texts or illustrated histories popular in the 18th Century (Pointon, 1993).³⁸

West (2004), however, draws attention to the problematic nature of using portraits as documents (contemporary or historical), because, as she notes, "the imaginative and interpretive aspects of all portraiture make it resistant to documentary reductivism" (West, 2004, p.59). Freeland (2010) too, in her critique of 'narrative theories of self' argues that:

³⁸ Named after the Rev. James Granger who, in 1769 published a 'biography' of England illustrated with engraved portraits. Grangerized (or extra-illustration) texts subsequently came to refer to books that included interleaved illustrations inserted from other published sources added by the reader or collector (Pointon, 1993).

"There is something different, about what we say in constituting ourselves and what we actually do when we go out and show ourselves to others in the world." (p.191, emphases in original)

Assumptions about the 'documentary' function of portraiture in effect reproduce the tension between portraits as mirrors of an external reality or the representation of an 'ideal' or essence: or between the facts of an event and the meanings or values intended to be conveyed (or read into an image).

At a more 'public' level portraits, or collections of portraits function to illustrate, reinforce, or constitute a family dynasty or lineage and legitimate succession. They can also serve as objects of inspiration or emulation, such as collections of illustrious men (sic), scholars or clerics, for example, or (physically) ideal women or 'beauties', or as a record of the 'star quality' of celebrities (West, 2004). Historically, they were also a means for expressing power or prestige – a demonstration of the will or claim to power on the part of Early Modern ruling princes or, subsequently, the rising bourgeois (Schneider, 1994; West, 2004).

As discussed in chapter 7 below, in the 20th and 21st century portraiture has been used to (literally) sell celebrity (as in the case example of a record cover). As noted earlier it has also been used (or at least interpreted as being used) to expose and subvert the 'spectacular society' of post second world war Western consumer capitalism, and the "total commodification of the image of the subject" (Buchloh 1994, p.63).

3.5.2 (Re-) Production processes

Although many of the art historical analyses focus on painted or photographic portraits, a range of different media have been used for the production and reproduction/distribution of portraits. These include, in addition to painting, drawing, statuary and photography, prints (including caricature and posters), coins and commemorative medals, banknotes and stamps, and on objects such as mugs, plates, postcards and other objects (West, 2004). Different media of production have implications for the

(ostensible) 'democratisation' of portraiture (see, for example, Tagg, 1988).³⁹ Different media of production also generate different 'truth claims', not only in terms of the assumed veracity of the image as a 'likeness' of, or resemblance to, the subject of the portrait, but also the 'authenticity' (or aura) of the image as 'art' (Benjamin (1999 [1936])). Chapter 7 below explores a number of these issues in the context of the use of digital technologies to produce and to re-produce images.

Finally, in a manner analogous to Becker's (1984) account of Art Worlds, Pointon (1993) describes the commercial and communal nature of the 'face business' both in terms of commissioning/selling, but also in the production process itself, involving a range of other skills and professions. In the 20th Century Andy Warhol's 'Factory', the studio in which he and his assistants produced many of his silk-screen prints, is an explicit recognition of the communal nature of the production of a 'Warhol'. The paradox of the factory-like production processes to produce 'authentic' or 'unique' works is also explored in more detail in chapter 7.

Pointon argues that art market conditions are influential on the conventions of the genre "contributing to the development of a visual grammar and determining our access to the image" (Pointon, 1997, p.194). In addition, as part of the 'restricted field' of 'high' art⁴⁰ portraiture is also supported by the social apparatus of museums, galleries and the academic and educational systems (Bourdieu, 2004).

3.5.3 Institutions of display

According to West (2004), portraits were intended for display, to be seen in the "public domain". The "times and spaces" of portrayal are themselves,

³⁹ Whether and what distinguishes such portraits, or in fact the 21st century equivalent the mobile telephone 'selfie', as or from 'art' clearly raises a number of other issues touched on in chapter 2 above. Brilliant (2002 [1991]), for example, raises some of these problems in his description of the requirements of US passport photographs. Although not specific to portraiture, Bourdieu's (1990b [1965]) discussion of photography as a "middle-brow art" may also be relevant here.

⁴⁰ Again, notwithstanding the difficulties of the defining characteristics (outwith the social processes of consecration) of portraits that are 'art' and those which are images of 'living or once living' named (or potentially so) individuals, but not (consecrated as) art.

productive of meanings specific, as Pointon (1993) argues, to “those times and spaces” (p.13). Portraits and portrait galleries in aristocratic or monarchical ‘spaces’ could, for example, function to constitute dynastic lineage, in 18th bourgeois interiors collectively they could function to make visible wealth, power and social position (Pointon, 1993; see also Hallett, 2012, for an account of the commissioning and display of the “Streatham Worthies”). Outwith the ‘private’ spaces of the (aristocratic, monarchical or bourgeois) ‘home’, portraits were also displayed in exhibitions and in shop windows. Pointon (1993), for example, describes how, in the 18th century, the Royal Academy annual exhibition was dominated by portraits, despite the greater significance of history painting in the hierarchy of genres (see footnote 13 above). The ‘times and spaces’ will thus determine the ‘publics’ who have access to the images, and whether what is on view is a whole collection or individual portraits.

The formation of the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) in 1856 and the Scottish National Portrait Gallery (SNPG) in 1889, extended portraiture’s ‘public’ while corralling it as a medium to document, frame or constitute a national history or identity (Barlow, 1997; Pointon, 1993; West, 2004).⁴¹

The NPG was initiated, under the impetus of Thomas Carlyle and Lord Stanhope, with the aim of exhibiting ‘eminent persons in British history’. Initially those portrayed had to have been dead for 10 years⁴² and to represent “persons who are most honourably commemorated in British history as warriors or statesmen, or in arts, in literature or in science” (Lord Stanhope in his speech to the House of Lords in March 1856, quoted in West, 2004, p.48). It was not the aesthetic qualities of the images that were the criteria for inclusion, but the qualities, or worthiness of those represented and the ‘authenticity’ of the portraits, that is portraits of individuals painted of them in their lifetime. As Barlow (1997) notes, both the criteria of ‘authenticity’ and of individual ‘worth’ created problems for the NPG. As discussed in

⁴¹ The NPG was among, if not the first national portrait gallery. The American Portrait Gallery, for example, was not founded until 1962, opening its doors in 1968. (<http://www.npg.si.edu/inform/visit.html>. (accessed 12 May 2015).

⁴² It was only in the 1960s that portraits of the still living were allowed into the gallery.

chapter 7 below, this tension continues into the 21st Century, when, in 2001, a number of the NPG trustees expressed doubts about the appropriateness of purchasing a set of portraits of the band Blur, produced by the artist Julian Opie. Media reports at the time suggested that the discussion centred on whether the band members were sufficiently famous and would pass the test of time.

Notwithstanding these tensions, Pointon (1993) notes that what the (State sponsored) national gallery created was a “narrative of national progress through portraiture”, an ostensibly scientifically verified but selective, or approved version of a predominantly English history of progress.

To the present day, contemporary artists continue to produce portraits, as evidenced by the annual portrait award (controversially⁴³) sponsored since 1989 by the petroleum company BP (who took over the sponsorship of the exhibition from the tobacco company John Player & Sons). ‘Blockbuster’ exhibitions either of, or including portraits continue to be held by UK museums (including, but extending beyond the National Portrait Galleries). At the same time there is a continuous stream of art historical publications exploring the genre (see for, example, Cummings, 2009; Freeland, 2010; Hall, 2014; Pointon, 2013; Schama, 2015). This suggests not only the genre’s on-going process of construction, but also, the continued engagement with the portrait – in other words, it still ‘sells’.

3.6 Summary

This chapter has described the historical evolution of the portrait and of portraiture in the Western European context, and drawn attention to some of

⁴³ In Autumn 2014 for example, protests were being held in London against BP’s sponsorship of art institutions (see for example, <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/sep/19/bp-arts-corporate-sponsorship-pressure>).

Although touched on here, and particularly in chapter 7, the changing nature of patronage in the context of this genre and the role of industry and business as commissioners of portraits and as sponsors of portraiture exhibitions (and the potentially mutually reinforcing ideological functions this serves) is a further area for a more broadly based sociology of portraiture to consider.

the provocations and paradoxes of the 'genre'. It has, for example, underlined the portrait's ambiguous position between a document, a representation of a 'living or once living' human subject, and an art object, articulating aesthetic codes and conventions. Further, this chapter has described how the two defining characteristics of the portrait: its assumed relatedness to an external referent and the 'likeness' or 'resemblance' it is intended to capture, are fluid and contested. The portrait has, for example, played into the complex relationship between the 'real' and the perceived, including self-perception. At the same time the concept of 'likeness' slips and slides between capturing physical resemblance and 'inner essence'. In the 20th and 21st century these parameters have been put under increasing pressure in the face of the shifting theories and politics of identity and subjectivity.

As this implies, the portrait and portraiture are fundamentally transactional, and mediated by relations of power at every stage. This transaction occurs at the micro level of the relationship between socially and historically located artist and sitter. It also occurs between art object/subject of the art object and a socially and historically located 'viewer', for whom artist and sitter 'perform', but who also has a constitutive role in terms of both the object – as 'art' and as 'portrait'- and the subject portrayed. At the 'macro' level the portrait is a product, produced collectively and circulating and reproduced in a field of cultural production. What perhaps makes the portrait distinct is that among the institutions of display are National Portrait Galleries which serve not (just) to consecrate the works as 'art' but, arguably, to consecrate a specific national identity.

The portrait as object and portraiture as a system and process are thus, as suggested at the beginning of this chapter, a "politically invested genre" (van Alphen, 1997) and one which, as Buchloh (1998) argues, encompasses both the "pictorial and the epistemic" as well as the ontological. As such, the portrait should offer itself for and contribute to sociological investigation. This implies an analysis at the level of the art object "in itself" (Becker, 2006)

and its location and circulation within the field of cultural production. The next chapter outlines the methods adopted here to begin such an exploration.

4. Taking a line for a walk: outlines of a method

4.1 Introduction: A betwixt and between-ness

Chapter 2 set out some of the dimensions of, and debates within, the sociology of art(s). In particular, attention was drawn to the ambiguous place of the art object within the sociological field of vision. In very crude terms two broad approaches have been adopted within the sub-discipline. One approach has been to analyse the institutional processes by which art objects are produced – both in the sense of physically produced, distributed, consumed/received and interpreted but also politically and discursively produced and productive. Less attention is given to the art object in and of itself, and its own potential ‘productivity’. A second approach has been to undertake detailed analysis of the art object but with a view to illustrating or revealing some (pre-determined) extra-aesthetic dimension such as socio-economic relations or changing conceptualisations of subjectivity. As also noted in chapter 2, there have been calls for a move toward some form of ‘synthesis’; one allowing for an analysis of the work’s sensuous properties and capacity to generate meanings and a shared evaluative engagement, combined with sociological understanding, analysis and critique of the social and political processes which impact upon the “creation, distribution and appreciation of artworks” (Inglis, 2005a, p.19). One of the questions this raises is how to apply this ‘synthesis’ empirically in relation to individual art objects.

It was suggested earlier that one response might be to develop an analytical method that was both centrifugal and centripetal. That is, a method that both works out from the art object, with a consideration of its material properties and generative capacities, to the wider social context of its production, distribution/circulation, reception/consumption including evaluation and interpretation, and centripetally from this wider social context back to the art object.

The following sets out the attempt to develop and apply such an approach (albeit not a fully worked out ‘methodology’). The aim is to describe and

respond to the art object (qua object) and its sensuous properties of colour, shape, internal form and content, and in a way that acknowledges its capacity to provoke or generate affordances (Gibson, 1986 [1979]), recognising that these would change over time, space and the locatedness of the 'viewer'/'spectator'. But also doing so in a way that respects disciplinary boundaries by avoiding unwarranted evaluative judgements as to the 'quality' of the object. Running in parallel is an analysis that locates the object within the field of cultural production, including the processes by which the object becomes consecrated (Bourdieu (2004) (or is disavowed) as art.

The additional component for the purposes of the thesis is the use of portraiture as a medium to explore the potential for such a 'synthesis'. As already alluded to, the choice of this genre was initially contingent – a result of my own shifting concerns from 'madness' to 'art'. But, as discussed in the previous chapter, this genre proved particularly fruitful because of its own complexities and paradoxes; its own centrifugal and centripetal forces:

"[The portrait] represents specific, existent subjects whose significance normally lies in their place in the extra-artistic world...At the same time, it is a self-contained work of art, valued even when its subject can no longer be identified." (Steiner, 1987, p.173)

Thus the portrait and portraiture necessitate consideration not just of the 'politics' of the processes of consecration of the art object but also the politics of normative evaluation of the subject portrayed.

The method therefore aims to encompass a way of capturing and analysing three dynamics and their interplay: the visual image; the subject(ivity) portrayed in and through the image; and the image's trajectory as an 'art' object in and through the field of cultural production.

One of the difficulties this presents is that it positions the study between a number of disciplinary, theoretical and, by extension, methodological stools. The aspiration to focus both at the micro-level of the visual image *and* its

location and constitution within 'macro-level' social structures and processes (Inglis, 2005a), mean that in disciplinary terms the thesis comes somewhere between visual studies/visual sociology and the sociology of arts, and between the sociology of arts and (new) art history, as well as (as intimated in chapter 2), between cultural sociology and the sociology of culture(s).

In other words it is not necessarily about achieving 'synthesis' but working in a space of 'between-ness' (Blau, 2001). First, it is concerned with the visual image as both a potential 'end in itself', its capacity to be "experienced as [a] value-relevant source[s] of sensuous knowledge" (Harrington, 2004, p.207), (albeit that this is itself socially and historically specific), *and* for what it contributes to an understanding of the specifically social processes within which it is located, constituted (and potentially constituting) and generative of 'meanings'. Second, by focusing specifically on the body of images which come to be constituted as 'art', it calls for, on the one hand, a consideration of the qualities of form, colour, content, proportion etc., or what Rose (2003) summarises as 'compositional interpretation' associated with art historical 'connoisseurship'. On the other hand, is the parallel need to critically understand the 'social [and historical] genesis' (Bourdieu, 2005 [1992]) of the 'good eye', that is the structure and operation of the field of cultural production within which art and artists are 'consecrated'. Finally, as images of 'people', the study implies some consideration of the relationship between the visual image/art object and subjectivity. In response to this 'between-ness' a more exploratory methodological approach is called for: one that does not easily fit into the more 'orthodox' accounts of social research processes setting out the 'research design', sampling frame, data collection and analytical framework (see for example, Ritchie and Lewis, 2003).

4.2 Taking a line for a walk: outline of a method

The artist Paul Klee described drawing as:

" [taking] An active line on a walk, moving freely without a goal. A walk for a walk's sake." ⁴⁴

While more purposive than Klee's description of drawing, in the absence of a methodological 'road map' or 'toolkit', the approach adopted here has elements of this sense of exploration and responsiveness – it is iterative, rather than rigidly pre-determined in advance. This, it is argued, is not to deny or ignore the need for rigour, transparency and reflexivity, but to be open to seeing, reading and 'listening' to the images: an active subject and an active object, taking a line for a walk.

4.2.1 Mapping out a direction of travel

A number of analysts have sought to map out a multi-dimensional approach as a way of grasping the complexity of the art or cultural object. As discussed in chapter 2, Born (2010), for example, sets out five themes underpinning her principles for a sociology of art that, she argues will offer "a non-reductive account of the aesthetic in theorising cultural production" (p.172). Griswold (1987), within a broader based sociology of culture approach, argues that to be "complete and persuasive", cultural analysis needs to include four key elements: the intentions of creative agents (the socially determined constraints and influences which shape the cultural outputs); the reception of cultural objects, including over time; the analyst's comprehension of the "internal structures, patterns, and symbolic carrying capacities of the cultural objects" (p.5); and explanation, the connections the analyst makes between cultural objects and the external world, mediated by an understanding of reception and intention. While the approach developed for the current study contains elements of both of these 'frameworks' or 'principles', a more pragmatic approach has been adopted one that it is felt is more suited to the exploratory nature of the thesis. This draws broadly on the work of Corse and Griffin (1997), which although based on an analysis of a literary work, combines multi-dimensionality with comparative simplicity.

⁴⁴ http://www.art-quotes.com/auth_search.php?authid=57#.Vae6ZkXq2nc (accessed 16 July 2015).

In their analysis of the changing status of the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, Corse and Griffin (1997) attempt to develop a framework for understanding the valuation of art objects in ways that take the objects seriously in themselves as well as their place in the social world. Arguing that “a complete understanding of cultural valorization requires attention to both context and content” (p.199), they describe three processes at play in canon formation and cultural valorization: evaluative criteria; interpretive strategies; and the institutional and organizational environment. From their account of the changing fortunes of the novel Corse and Griffin reveal the social and historical fluidity of these processes over time and space. Although their analysis still suggests an object buffeted by social and political determinations, rather than having its own ‘affordances’, their attempt to link context (the social and institutional environment) and the text as ‘read’ (the evaluative criteria and interpretive strategies adopted by the book’s “reviewers”), is felt to provide a productive starting point for the approach attempted here.

Following the example of Corse and Griffin, the thesis takes a case study approach, using qualitative methods (primarily textual analysis of visual and documentary material). This allows for an iterative exploration of a small number of images, the subjectivities constituted in and through the images, and the complex relationships between the images and the social and historical contexts in and through which they are produced and productive.

This approach was initially ‘piloted’ in relation to two portraits (not reproduced here), one by the early 20th century painter Henri Matisse of his wife (*The woman with the hat* (1905)), and a self-portrait painted in the late 20th Century by the artist Jenny Saville (*Reverse* (2002-03)).⁴⁵ Building on the learning from the pilot analysis each of three case studies discussed here broadly comprises, first, a description of the conceptual ‘frame’ which informed the context of and for selecting the case study images. Second, an account is given of each case study image’s colour, form and content,

⁴⁵ The analysis was included in an unpublished paper: “Face value: Toward a new sociology of the arts and its objects”, produced as the end of first year report in October 2008.

drawing both on my own reading (as analyst), but also informed by published accounts. The aim of this stage was to draw out each image's 'internal narrative', but also their 'affordances'. Third, the analysis describes the contemporaneous and subsequent evaluative criteria by which the properties of the images have been assessed and the 'textual meaning' attached, including drawing on artists' own accounts, where available, indicating the values or qualities and meanings which they perceive in their work. Importantly this included not just an account of evaluations of the image, but of the imaged, drawing attention to issues of subjectivity and the power to control one's (re)presentation of self. Fourth, to consider the institutional and organisational infrastructure within which the images and their evaluation are produced (and re-produced) circulated, received or consumed and appraised.

In the spirit of taking a line for a walk, this overall structure has been interpreted flexibly to reflect and respond to issues that emerged in relation to each of the case study portraits – issues which, as the next section describes, were generated by the images rather than necessarily anticipated in advance.

4.2.2 Selecting the images

Two dimensions (if not explicit 'criteria') have informed the selection of images for in-depth analysis. Both dimensions combine, in their own way, an element of 'chance', if not 'randomisation', as well as a subjective element which undoubtedly informed the 'coming to consciousness' or 'given to be seen-ness' of specific images.

The first dimension is the conceptual 'frame'⁴⁶ for each case study. Although a central concern of the thesis is with giving the art object its own space, allowing the work a generative capacity, there is a pragmatic need to

⁴⁶ The term 'frame' is not used here in Goffman's (1986 [1974]) sense of "frameworks of understanding" or ways for organizing experience, but more in the spatial sense, of marking out a particular conceptual space in which to consider the images. As also with 'frameworks of understanding', however, different concepts could undoubtedly have been used to provide the prism through which to view the same images.

construct initial boundaries to the analysis. These 'frames', however, were not pre-determined in advance of the thesis, nor were the images selected to reinforce or critique the particular framing concepts, though this may have emerged in the course of consideration of the particular images. The frames do though have a degree of social theoretic salience, as well as salience to portraiture. This allows for a back and forth between what the images offer the 'frames', and what the 'frames' offer the images.

For chapter 5 the conceptual frame is the ostensible 'death' of the subject (Foucault 1991a [1969]), but also Barthes' (2000 [1980]) analysis of "punctum" and "studium". This arose primarily out of preliminary social theoretic reading but also a parallel reading of the literature around portraiture, and particularly (as outlined in chapter 3), the apparent 'vacating of subjectivity' (Buchloh, 1998; van Alphen, 1997) read into portraiture of the late 20th Century. It gains added piquancy when it emerged that the artist, Francesca Woodman, whose works are discussed in this chapter, had committed suicide in her early 20s.

Chapter 6 is a response to the concept of the 'abject', outlined in Kristeva's (1982) discussion of the *Powers of Horror*. This particular 'frame' emerged from a chance remark by one of the thesis supervisors in response to a Woodman image. This provoked an exploration of the concept, and a consideration of how it could be used to understand portraits that might represent "abject subject matter" (Ben-Levi et al, 1993) or be read as transgressive in some way, such as in the work of Gilbert and George and Roger Ballen's photography. This analysis unexpectedly opened on to a consideration of apartheid and the position of 'poor whites' in South Africa.

Questions of 'authenticity' and 'aura' (Benjamin, 1999 [1936]) which frame the third case study discussed in chapter 7 - Julian Opie's image of the band *Blur* - arose from an interest in considering the implications of digital production and reproduction on both art, and on the 'aura' and 'authenticity' of the subject of the art. Secondly, it was also a personal response to the 'dark' atmosphere of the 'abject' case study. It was felt that there was scope

for the inclusion of a (subjectively, materially and substantively) 'lighter' image, but one that still allowed the exploration of significant themes. This too had its unexpected affordances, exposing the role of institutions, such as the National Portrait Gallery in London, in conferring 'authenticity' not just on images but on the subjects in the images – an exposé wholly unanticipated when the image was chosen for inclusion.

The selection of the specific images again combines a degree of 'chance' and subjective remembering: a postcard, for example, seen in an office (Opie's image of *Blur*), or an exhibition attended (Woodman), or the recall of an image, albeit mis-remembered (Ballen's image of Dresie and Casie in chapter 6).⁴⁷

Although not determined at the outset, the selection of images provides the opportunity for some within-case study comparison. In chapter 5 two self-portraits by Francesca Woodman are discussed and compared. The double self-portrait by the artists Gilbert and George and the double portrait of the twins Dresie and Casie by Roger Ballen in chapter 6 provide a way of comparing portraits which, in different ways, are potentially 'transgressive'. The detailed reading of the portraits in the course of the case study reveals some of their similarities as well as their differences. The final case study, detailed in chapter 7, focuses on one image comprised of four portraits – one for each of the members of the band *Blur*. This provides a within-image comparison.

All of the images have been institutionally consecrated as 'art' works. This of course immediately begs the question, alluded to in chapter 2, about the processes that constitute works as 'art'. Arguably, the selection of these works serves to reproduce these processes of institutional consecration. It is hoped, however, that by exploring responses to the works that these processes are exposed, allowing them to be subject to critique.

⁴⁷ As discussed in chapter 6, I initially believed that the image of the twins *Dresie and Casie* was by the American photographer Diane Arbus who was active in the 1950's and 1960's. It was only further investigation that revealed its 'back story' as an image by Roger Ballen made in South Africa in the 1990's.

They were also all produced in the latter half 20th Century and all draw on photography at some stage in their production. The selection of images from the late 20th Century was primarily a practical decision; it circumscribed, to a degree, the historical context and allowed engagement with comparatively contemporary theoretical concerns – concerns that have their parallels in portraiture (see chapter 3).

The focus on photography or photographic portraits was also emergent rather than purposive. It may, however, reflect the ubiquity of the medium for contemporary representational (and even non-representational) art. As discussed both in chapter 3, and in the relevant case studies, photography generates its own 'regimes of truth' (Hand, 2012; Tagg, 1988). This may limit the generalizability of aspects of the discussion to portraits (or art works) in other media. However, it should be noted that the analytical framework was developed around two 'pilot' images (referred to earlier) both of which were paintings in oils. This may suggest that the framework, if not the discussion of particular images may have wider applicability.

4.2.3 Reading the images

As discussed in chapter 2, there have been attempts within sociology to focus on the art object, but the tendency has been to view them as embodying or illustrative of wider social processes (see for example, Smith and Jenks 2000, 2006; Witkin, 1995, 1997). Zolberg (1997), describes a number of studies focusing on particular art objects or genres which, while useful in pointing up aspects of social process or their role in social symbolism, do not address the art or cultural object for its own sake - attention remains on context rather than text. Wolff's (2008) analysis of the appraisal of 20th Century English art similarly tends to focus on the discourse about the images, on the social context of critiques, rather than the object itself. "Visual methodologies" (Rose, 2003) which do provide a structure for "interpreting" visual images, such as semiotics, for example, psychoanalysis and discourse analysis, are also, arguably, albeit in different ways concerned with ways of drawing attention to, understanding or explaining something beyond (though produced by and through) the image: signifying practices, desire, the male

gaze, the production of subjects/subjectivity (Chaplin, 1994; Rose, 2003). Blau (2001) who does make an attempt to combine an understanding of the institutional context of art with an analysis of the artwork, qua artwork, nonetheless does not provide a systematic method for talking about the images.

The focus in the thesis on the portrait, the portrayed and the social processes of production, circulation and reception also (again) suggests the need for a degree of methodological eclecticism for 'reading' the image. Thus, the descriptions of the individual images draws on art historical considerations of colour, form, shape and content. In addition, although not a systematic analysis of the images as signs, reference is made to the indexical nature of portraiture, but also, from Barthes (2000 [1980]), the concepts of 'studium' and 'punctum' (see chapter 5). The discursive function of images in producing or constituting subjectivities (of the subject in the image and through the positioning of the viewer) is touched upon throughout the case studies. Psychoanalytic accounts inform the conceptual frame of the abject, but the 'gaze' of the Other from Mulvey, (1975) and Lacan (1981 [1964]), also play out across the analysis. Berger's (1972) early work on *Ways of Seeing* provides a way of thinking through the ways in which images achieve "ideological" effects. Bourdieu's (2004) analysis of the field of cultural production, while not a 'method' as such, provides the prism through which to understand the constitution of images and creators as 'art' and 'artists'.

There is undoubtedly a risk that with methodological eclecticism comes theoretical incommensurability (for example, drawing on art historical discourses to analyse the individual art object, while also wanting to critically examine the implication of these discourses for 'producing' the work as an 'art' object). Yet, it is argued, one of the areas that the study set out to explore was whether and how, it was possible to look to produce a coherent account for all the 'work' that images do at the 'micro' level and at the macro level. The case studies are that line being taken for a walk.

In addition to problems of theory and method, there is, also the problem of presenting the description of an image in words. Barthes describes this as the “uneasiness of being a subject torn between two languages, one expressive and the other critical” (Barthes 2000 [1980], p.8). This is perhaps unavoidable given the medium of presentation - a thesis is about words and argument, but the need to ‘talk’ about the images perhaps risks obscuring the images themselves. It is hoped that by including images within the text, not as “objective evidence”, as commentary on others’ use of text and image, or as a “new literary form” (Chaplin, 1994), but as sensuous objects and domains of knowledge in their own right (at least to a degree), the artworks are enabled to exercise their own (partial) ‘agency’.

The images themselves have been downloaded from the internet for inclusion in the thesis (and in the process changed in size and scale). The implications of reproduction processes on the ‘aura’ and ‘authenticity’ of artworks is discussed in more detail in chapter 7. It is, however, the case that the very method used is both a means for examining the issues and an example of the very issues requiring examination.

4.2.4 Seeing the wider landscape

Extending the prism from the image to the ‘wider landscape’ through which the line travels (to extend the metaphor), involved the analysis of a range of documentary material. This includes sociological material to inform an understanding of the discipline’s engagement with ‘art’ (discussed in chapter 2) and to inform the conceptual framing for each study. In addition the project draws on art historical theory and analysis, both in general, in relation to portraiture as a genre, and in relation to particular artists/artworks. For the analysis of individual works the data sources extend to what, in other contexts, would be called ‘grey literature’. This is material not published in peer reviewed contexts (‘academic’ journals, books etc.), but includes, for example, newspaper art criticism or reviews of exhibitions, commentaries by individuals on their own or ‘non-academic’ webpages, ‘blogs’, as well as artists’ own websites. Falling between the two might be ‘popular’ histories of, for example ‘Brit pop’, discussed in chapter 7.

The range of material was identified from citations in the literature, 'Google' searches, LexisNexis and Factiva newspaper searches, links in exhibition reviews or guides, and other sources driven by the particular image under consideration. The analysis of the documentary material comprises primarily broad brush 'content analysis' to identify 'themes' across and within the material.

Some of the images, particularly those by Gilbert and George (chapter 6) and Julian Opie (chapter 7), generated a considerable amount of material. In part this is illustrative of the very consecration processes the study was also seeking to document, particularly when the image itself, as in the portrait of the band Blur, discussed in chapter 7, is problematically poised between 'art' and 'pop'. The documentary material, however, also raises three linked methodological issues. First, it begs questions about who and what gets written about and in what fora, and who is excluded from the record. In the case of Opie, for example a lot of newspaper articles have the air of product placement – generated at times of exhibitions of his work. While, on the one hand there is a practical need for accessible documentary sources, this does raise the problem that the absence or presence of commentary cannot be taken as a sign for the absence or presence of value, but may be a sign of differential power in the process of evaluation and access to media for dissemination. Second, and relatedly, as Bird (1979) suggests, the readiness of documentary sources reflects contemporary aesthetic discourses and judgments and should therefore be treated both as a resource *and* critiqued as a discourse. That is, it is necessary to use the material as a topic in itself to be examined critically, but also a resource to be 'mined'. Where possible, the material drawn on here has been used as a resource primarily for descriptive purposes, but approached more critically when used to understand the context for the reception of a particular image.

The third issue this opens on to is how to assess or adjudicate the *quality* of the documentary material – particularly in relation to what was described above as 'grey literature'. Indirectly this again points up the 'between-ness' of the thesis. The criteria of a systematic review where attempts are made to

appraise the methodological rigour informing a particular conclusion or finding, do not 'fit' in the context of the appraisal of art works, and yet, to understand the social processes of evaluation and consecration, this suggests the need to understand the 'position' of the 'speaker'. Where possible an attempt is made to identify this positioning, but the 'greyer' the source, such as blogs, the more difficult this becomes.

A further source of material has been the art exhibitions attended in the course of undertaking the research, which, even if not directly related to the subject matter, have helped to stimulate questions or add to an understanding of context. Outwith this direct contact with art objects the study did not involve interviews (e.g. with artists, or art critics), surveys (e.g. of museum or exhibition attendance) or other 'fieldwork'.

4.3 Dilemmas and limitations

4.3.1 Omissions and commissions

A number of the images selected raised ethical issues. In particular Roger Ballen's image of Dresie and Casie, reproduced in chapter 6. As discussed in that context, the production and reproduction of images of others raises specific questions of the power to control the construction and distribution of self-identity. There is a risk that by reproducing images where this self-presentation and authorising cannot be assumed, this reinforces or generates processes of 'misrecognition'. In a different vein, but also raising admittedly unresolved ethical issues, is the reproduction and analysis of the work of Francesca Woodman (see chapter 5), and the risk of exploiting (or perpetuating the exploitation of) her image beyond her death. These ethical issues may be particularly pertinent in the context of analyses of portraiture (as opposed to, for example, landscape, or abstract art), with their ostensible connectedness to a 'living or once living person'. But it does raise the uncomfortable question when does 'regarding the pain of others' (Sontag, 2004), slip from one of "witnessing" to one of objectification (Nussbaum, 1995) and a "gaze of mastery" (Young, 2005)?

As well as an ethics of commission the thesis raises an ethics of omission. None of the portraits in the final selection is by or of black artists or subjects. This is recognised as a significant limitation of the thesis. As suggested in chapter 3 the power relations at play across each of the different dimensions of concern to the study in terms of the image, the subject in and of the image and the position of the art and artist in the field of cultural production, have, historically worked to exclude, negate or render as 'other' (the subject and the work) of black artists and the representation of black subjects. Any subsequent extension of the thesis would seek to critically examine, in the context of portraiture, the 'racialized regime of representation' (Hall, 2003 [1997]).

4.3.2 The researcher's gaze

"It is possible to investigate inanimate objects...the exercise of power is not necessarily absent in relations between the researcher and their treatment of the objects, but the situation is more complex when the researcher enters into a social relationship with a research subject." (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002, p.156)

The theme throughout this discussion has been the difficulty of achieving 'methodological rigour', where the objects of inquiry are individual artworks, and where implicit, if not explicit aesthetic and subjective judgements are being made at every stage. Thus, aesthetic judgements inform institutional definitions of what constitutes 'art' and who is defined as an 'artist' (as well as differential access to the means for art production), the availability and nature of the commentary on the works and the accessibility of works. In the context of portraiture power relations play out also in who is portrayed (and how). In addition, subjectivity or the analyst's own 'positioning' informs the fundamental questions asked, the selection of works and the means for analysing the images.

Notwithstanding the ostensibly less complex relationship between the researcher and the inanimate object, posited by Ramazanoglu and Holland, (2002), there is an argument for saying that the researcher's own position, values, their subjectivity, have an even more intense role in the research

process. At every turn my own position, and, in effect, exercise of authorial 'power' intrudes; into the choice of subject matter (why 'art' and not madness), the selection of images, my own far from 'pure' gaze, the interpretations of the subjects in the image. Thus, while seeking to avoid the "god trick" (Haraway, 1988), the 'view from nowhere', the illusion of 'objectivity', it is also important to acknowledge the imposition or intrusion of my own "situated knowledges". That is, as a social researcher who struggles with the 'in-between-ness', of seeking methodological rigour in a context in which the normal 'rules' of social research do not apply – a struggle perhaps reflected in the straining for an appropriate metaphor to describe, but also render transparent (and hence open to critique) the process undertaken (a 'synthesis', 'between-ness', 'a line taking a walk'). But also as a late middle-age, (lower) middle-class female, neither artist, nor art historian, for whom 'art' as presented in the context of an English secondary modern school education was primarily a practical activity and one that felt closed off to me (lacking the requisite 'habitus'?)).

Arguably the breaching of the normal 'rules' of social research is a limitation of the study. But it is also a 'finding' in the sense of demonstrating the specificities of the field and the disciplinary challenges this poses. It demonstrates in its very process the complexity of 'synthesising' "value-distanciating" social analysis and "value affirming aesthetic appraisal" (Harrington, 2004). No claims can be made to have overcome this in the case studies, but, what the approach described does seek to achieve is a degree of *transparency*, and in this way to open the thesis to intersubjective and disciplinary criticism and validation (or refutation): to open up the potential for the line to go in a different direction.

5. The constant re-appearance of the disappearing self

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 Finding Woodman

The first image by, and of, Francesca Woodman that I was aware of seeing was while visiting the *Naked Portrait* exhibition, held in Edinburgh in 2007.⁴⁸ Figure 1 is the image I recall, one of a series by Woodman called *Self-deceit*. I came across the image again in 2009 when it was used to advertise an exhibition of Woodman's work held at another Edinburgh gallery.⁴⁹

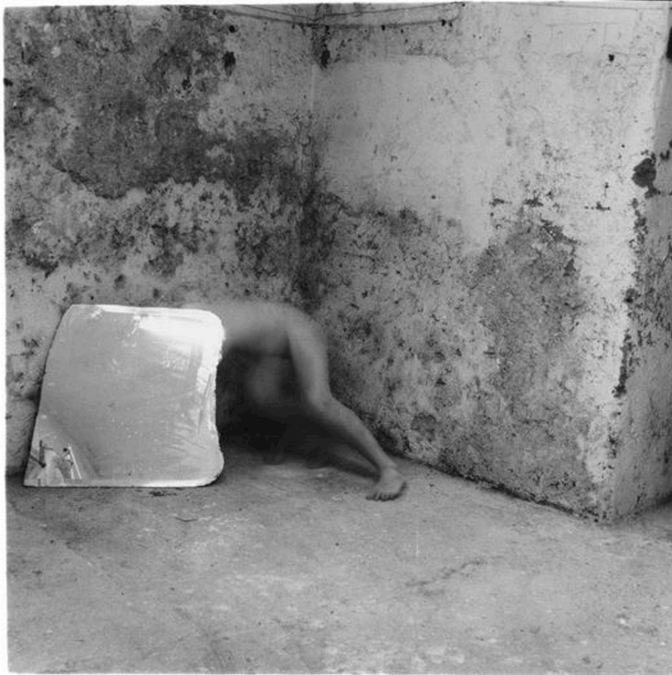


Figure 5.1
Francesca Woodman
Self-Deceit #5
Rome, 1978

⁴⁸ Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh, 6 June – 1 September 2007.

⁴⁹ Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, 4 April – 13 June 2009.

While I cannot recall the detail of the label accompanying the image shown at the *Naked Portrait* exhibition, the published catalogue captures the essence of the text:

"In a forbiddingly bare interior, with pock-marked walls, Woodman's naked form interacts with a roughly shaped piece of mirror. She crawls on the floor, turning away from us...The pictures distil some urge to self-effacement to retreat from an oppressive world of social interactions into a private melancholy sphere, in which the self is stripped bare. Such readings are facilitated by our knowledge of Woodman's youth...and the fact that she killed herself at the age of twenty-one (sic), suggesting (we presume) some complex history of depression and self-doubt." (Hammer, 2007, p.96)

It was this apparent 'self-effacement' and desire to hide, the physical vulnerability of her body, the later knowledge (from a subsequent reading of the catalogue) that she committed suicide at age 22, coupled with the nostalgic quality that flows from black and white photography, that seemed, on subsequent looking, to give the image its emotive power. In other words it was a combination of the content, form and biography that informed the image's 'aesthetic' impact.

In the context of the questions posed in chapter 2, and specifically how to empirically address images in ways that retain an appropriate balance between consideration of the art object's own affordances and critical analysis of the social practices and institutions of art production, distribution and consumption, this image raised a number of compelling questions. First, on the one hand, how to comprehend its power as an image, and the potential for this emotive, sensuous and/or intellectual 'power' to be shared or "intersubjectively defensible" (Harrington, 2004, p.201), albeit not 'universally'. And, on the other hand, to also retain a critical understanding of the social processes by which the image and the subject of the image are framed, constituted and evaluated.

Second, and relatedly, why did attempts at an answer keep revolving around the potential for the image to provoke a recognition of subjectivity or selfhood, an answer that seemed to run wilfully against the theoretical

critique of a unitary, essentialist 'subject'. That is, notwithstanding arguments for the concept of the 'subject' (and 'artist') as an effect of power (Foucault, 1991a [1969]), and whose 'death' was long overdue, what the image seemed to conjure up was a sense of 'thereness' (Jones, 2006), not just of a physical, bodily exterior but an 'interior' 'self' that was neither entirely unitary and self constituting nor wholly fragmented and discursively constituted.

Two conceptual 'frames' were drawn upon to explore these issues in relation to two of Woodman's photographs. First, as (ostensible) self-portraits the images provided an opportunity to consider arguments for the 'death' of the subject (as 'a' self, and as an 'author'/artist). Second, as visual images, consideration was given to Barthes' (2000 [1980]) concept of the 'punctum' as a way to think about what their sensuous properties might provoke within a viewing 'subject' or subject(s), without necessarily engaging in qualitative judgements. While acknowledging the potential incommensurability of these two framing devices, the aim here is to examine these images with a view to understanding how even as the notion of single, unified, 'subject', is dismantled, there is a constant re-appearance, in a different guise, theoretically and representationally of a something, a 'thereness', in Jones' (2006) term, that is, a continued sense of a self or selfhood, which is perceived as comprehensible, recognisable (and hence shared), notwithstanding its mutability. Further, it is suggested that this desire or yearning to recognize (and an awareness, on the part of the artist of that desire) that precisely gives these images their 'punctum' (Barthes, 2000 [1980]), and may be implicated in the evaluation of both the image and the imaged.

The following sections will briefly sketch out the two conceptual frames, before focusing on the two images, to consider what these frames afford to a 'reading' of the images, but also, importantly, the images' own supplement to these frames. This is followed by an account of the evaluative context. The institutional consecration of Woodman's work in general is then explored, before drawing together some of the emerging themes. Before

moving on, however, there is a value in momentarily reflecting on some of the contingencies of time that informed and structured the analysis.

5.1.2 Protentions and Retentions

“The past is always experienced through a retention of previous events – a construct of the present – just as the future is experienced as a protention of possible eventualities – also a present construct. Both constructs, of past and future, alter dynamically as the present evolves through the shifting relations between prehending subject and prehended object.” (Born, 2010, pp.183–184)

Born (2010) draws attention to the “multiple temporalities that subtend cultural objects” (p.195). In the context of the thesis among these “multiple temporalities” should be included the time period it took between starting the main study and its completion. Over this time period not only did the analytic approach take firmer shape, but the process of canonisation (or de-sacralization) of the cultural objects discussed continued. This was most evident in relation to the works considered in this first case study. The initial analysis (undertaken 2009 – 2010), helped to inform the structure of the subsequent two case studies (another means by which art objects can generate affordances), but the sacralisation of the artist, Francesca Woodman, whose work is the focus of this chapter, also gathered pace changing direction and emphases over time. Returning to this case study in 2015 proved to be an opportunity, allowing an examination of this process almost in ‘real time’. But it also (as an effect of this process), required further reflection on my initial analysis, and particularly the earlier emphasis on the ‘death’ of the artist/subject. This case study, perhaps even more than the following two, is therefore marked by, and illustrative of, what Born (2010) describes as the cultural object’s “protentions” and “retentions”, and the changing relations between myself as the “prehending subject” and the “prehended [art] object”.

5.2 Conceptual framing – ‘death’ and the punctum

“The author as fixed, uniform and unconstituted creative source has...died. The concept of authorial dominance in the text has also been thrown open to question.

But the author, now understood as constituted in language, ideology, and social relations, retains a central relevance... in relation to the meaning of the text (the author being the first person to fix meaning, which, of course, will be subject to redefinition and fixing by all future readers)..." (Wolff, 1981, p.136)

"[For Mallarmé] and for us too, it is language which speaks, not the author...to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not me." (Barthes, 1977 [1968], p.143)

As discussed in chapter 3, at the core of portraiture is what Brilliant (2002 [1991]) calls an "intended relationship" between the image and a "human original". Although the nature of this relationship historically slips and slides between being the reflection of a physical, exterior likeness, or capturing some sort of inner essence, there remains a desire for "for the image to render up the body, and thereby the self, in its fullness and truth" (Jones, 2006, p.xiv). In the 20th and 21st Century, however, the concept of a unitary human 'original' or 'essence', has been the subject of extensive critique, and one which brings into question a view of the portrait as in some way expressing, as van Alphen (1997) notes "the 'original', unique subjectivity of the trayer, but also that of the trayed" (p.239).

The apparent paradox of the perpetuation of a genre of visual art predicated on a conceptualisation of both a 'doer' (a unique artist-creator) and a 'deed' (the act and outcome of portrayal), when the notion of an autonomous, unitary, substantive subject has been exposed as ideological, and an effect of discourse, suggested one frame through which to approach the Woodman images. In large part this was because in different ways these issues would have resonance across the subsequent case studies, so would provide an initial opportunity to explore some of their implications. In addition, the fact that so much of the 'talk' about Woodman's work drew (initially at least) on the artist's biography suggested an opportunity to consider the persistence of a sense of self - as subject, object or, in fact 'viewer', albeit reconfigured and mutable.

No attempt is made here to address the philosophical, sociological and psychoanalytic streams of thought relating to the concept and experience of subjectivity and the 'self' (for a brief summary in the context of literary and

cultural criticism see, for example, Hall, 2004; Heartfield, 2002). But perhaps the key intellectual shift of relevance in relation to portraiture of the 20th and 21st century, has been from a concept of a (bourgeois, masculinist) unitary, self-making subject, a mind separated from its body, and with an all-seeing/perceiving 'God's eye' view, to a conceptualisation of a fragmented, situated, partial, decentred, discursive, performative and embodied self, one that is both constituted and constituting. It articulates a break with the Western European humanist conceptualisation of subjectivity expressed in Albertian perspectivalism (Jones, 2006), the Cartesian distinction between the thinking 'I' and the material object (Woodall, 1997a) and the Kantian "rational agent, whose primary duty is to bring selfish desires and behaviors [sic] into line with reason-based ideals of social duty" (Hall, 2004, p.27), to a questioning of a unitary, self-conscious 'presence', constituted outwith social processes of language and relations of power.

This re-thinking of subjectivity encompasses Nietzsche's critique of the 'metaphysics of substance', the assumption of a volitional 'something' behind or before a 'deed' (Brickell, 2005; Lloyd, 1999). It also draws on psychoanalysis and the Freudian concept of the unconscious mind with its repressed sexual instincts "leaving", according to Woodall (1997a) "the cognisant mind no longer 'master in its own house'" (p.12). Lacan's (1977 [1949]) account of the 'mirror stage' through which a child acquires a sense both of its wholeness and its fragmentation or incompleteness; his understanding of the child's acquisition of language as the mechanism through which "the child takes its place as subject in the ideological or symbolic relations of the family" (Wolff, 1981, p.133); and his concept of the 'screen' (1964) to describe the process by which we are self-constituted and constituted in relation to the gaze of others, conceptually "give language, representation and the social a prominent place in the constitution of the subject" (Wolff, 1981, p.132).⁵⁰ This theme of a socially and historically constituted subject also emerges through Marxism, and Marx's contention that "it is not the consciousness of men which determines their existence, but

⁵⁰ See also footnote 30 above for further background on Lacan.

their social existence which determines their consciousness" (Marx, 1993 [1859], p.2). Building on this, Althusser (1971) argues that the subject is an *effect* of ideology: "ideology hails, or interpellates concrete individuals as subjects" (cited in Wolff, 1981, p.130, see also MacDonnell, 1991 [1986]). Thus, there is no 'subjective essence' outwith this constitution in ideology, although, as Wolff notes, all subjects are unique (Wolff, 1981, p.131). The post-modern theorists, including Derrida and Foucault further trouble the notion of a substantive *a priori* essence outwith discourse. Derrida (1997 [1967]) seeks to deconstruct the 'metaphysics of presence' through a critique of phonocentrism – the primacy of speech with its assumption of a "fully conscious subject who utters pure and full meaning" (Youngblood Jackson, 2010, p.701). For Derrida language is so unstable that meaning is endlessly deferred. Différance is the term Derrida uses to capture this process of deferral. Youngblood Jackson argues that the "escape of full presence" that this implies "leaves behind the fiction of origins, foundations and a pure consciousness" (2010, p.702).

For Foucault the subject is *produced* in two different "senses or places" (Hall, 2003 [1997], p.56): discourses (of madness, the penal system, sexuality, for example) produce subjects; discourse also produces *subject positions*. Thus, in Foucault's analysis of Velasquez' *Las Meninas* (2006a [1966]), the subject position constituted by the discourse of representation is that of the Sovereign (Hall, 2003 [1997]). Foucault's analysis of individual paintings by Manet similarly explores not what the image says,

"...But what it produces...the behaviour that it generates, and what it leaves barely seen among the social machinery, in which it distributes bodies, spaces and utterances." (Bourriaud, 2011, p.13)

Thus, in his analysis of Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1881-82) Foucault explores how the painting places, or rather dis-places, the viewer:

"While all classical painting, by its system of lines, of perspective, of vanishing point, etc., had assigned to the viewer and to the painter a certain precise place, fixed, constant, from where the spectacle was seen...Here, on the contrary...it is not possible to know where the painter has placed

himself...and where we must place ourselves in order to see a spectacle such as this...with this last technique, Manet plays with the picture's property of being not in the least a normative space whereby the representation fixes us or fixes the viewer to a point, a unique point from which to look." (Foucault, 2011 [c1971], p.78³¹)

As Bourriaud (2011) notes, Foucault's analysis of these paintings excluded reference to Edouard Manet, as an *individual*. This resonates with Foucault's earlier analysis of the author function as an effect of discourse (Foucault 1991a [1969]). Addressed primarily to the production and interpretation of the written text, Foucault's criticism of the authorial privileges manifest in the concepts of 'the work' and the notion of 'writing', is accompanied by an analysis of the implications of the author's name. The name of the author, Foucault (1991a [1969]) argues "manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture" (p.107). Discourses containing the author function are distinguished by four characteristics. Of these perhaps the most resonant in the context of an analysis of self-portraiture is the "plurality of self" which all discourses endowed with the author function possess³², thus in the context of the narrative text there is a distinction between "the author", the "real writer" and the "fictitious speaker". For Foucault, writing effaces the signs of the "real writer":

"Using all the contrivances that he sets up between himself and what he writes, the writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular individuality." (1991a [1969], p.102)

The 'author' (or 'artist') is thus a function of a specific discourse. By critiquing or questioning the (discursive) function of the author, Foucault argues that he is not "abandoning" the subject, but opening a space within which to analyse the production and constitution of both 'the author' and the 'subject':

³¹ This is based on a recording of a lecture given by Foucault in Tunisia in 1971.

³² The remaining three are: "(1) the author function is linked to the juridical and institutional system that encompasses and articulates all discourses; (2) it does not affect all discourses in the same way at all times and in all civilizations; (3) it is not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a discourse to its producer, but rather by a series of specific and complex operations." (Foucault, 1991a [1969], p.113).

"It is a matter of depriving the subject (or its substitute) of its role as originator, and of analysing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse." (Foucault, 1991a [1969], p.118)

At around the same time Barthes (1977 [1968]) was similarly arguing for the 'death of the author'. For Barthes, however, this is about the 'descralization of the image of the author' – of rejecting the idea of a single, fixed, 'God-given' meaning, and opening the text to multiple readings, to multi-valency. As a result, the unity of the text, according to Barthes, lies "not in its origin but its destination" – the reader or viewer, who also does not have a history, but is "simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted" (1977 [1968]), p.148). For Barthes, "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author" (p.148).

It is this theoretical death of the author-artist that will comprise one of the frames through which to consider Woodman's work, and in particular the 'talk' about her work. But in looking at the image's themselves, a further, and perhaps contrary concept will be considered - that of the 'punctum'.

It is from Barthes too that this second 'frame' is drawn. Although perhaps running against the grain of the 'death of the subject-artist' as an autonomous individual, it nonetheless, arguably runs with the grain of multi-valency – of multiple interpretations or readings.

Although not an analytical framework as such, Barthes' distinction, set out in *Camera Lucida* (Barthes (2000 [1980])) between the interpretation of, investment in (or effects generated by) a photograph or photographs in the viewer (the *Spectator*) in terms of the 'studium' and 'punctum', provides a starting point. The 'studium' is the interpretation and response to an image that draws on culturally and historically specific understandings of the social and political codes manifest in the form and content of the image. The *punctum*, however, is not about the substance or content of the image *per se*, but the sense of 'wounding' or 'pricking' that an image may generate in an individual viewer, a supplement, perhaps from a detail, that creates a "disturbance" in the course of viewing an image, and which, unlike the

studium, is not coded: “what I name cannot really prick me. The incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance” (Barthes, 2000 [1980], p.51). As summarised by Rose (2003), the *punctum* is unintentional and ungeneralizable. It is also highly personal. The aim here is to use Barthes’ conceptualisation very loosely to analyse what ‘disturbances’ the images may provoke in a situated viewer.

5.3 Selection of the images

As discussed in chapter 4 to talk of ‘selection’ or ‘sampling’ criteria is perhaps to suggest a spurious methodological rigour. How can one ‘sample’ art objects or products? It would be hard to select on the basis of some imputed ‘typicality’ in relation to the artist’s work or to self-portraiture in general. Partiality and subjectivity are therefore written into the very process as well as the object of study. By way of defence it is argued that the purpose is not to make statements of ‘generalizability’ (where even the ‘general’ is problematic e.g. ‘generalizable’ across an artist’s body of work, across contemporary self-portraiture, across portraiture?), but to use two images to examine and explore some initial ideas – and in this sense selection could be argued to be ‘purposive’.

As noted above, the selection of Woodman’s work as the basis for one of the case studies emerged from a combination of the institutionalised process of gallery going and the subjective response to the works on display. The main ‘criteria’ for selecting images from the photographer’s body of work were that the image had to include Woodman (and not be solely of others who she used as models or of inanimate objects/still lives). Images that, in the western art canon might be categorised as ‘nudes’ (even when they may be considered, in Hammer’s terminology ‘Naked Portraits’ (2007)) were excluded, but only to set boundaries on the number of dimensions which could be addressed - debates around the representation of the naked body, particularly the white, young, female body, important in themselves, would have added further complexity to an already complex undertaking (chapter 6, below, however, does attempt to address the question of the naked self-portrait, albeit that of the differently charged male body). Finally, and even

less justifiably, the images were those that, when looking through Woodman's work consistently arrested my attention. It was this 'arrest' that required (a sociological) explanation.

Another methodological objection that could be made is that the images are not truly 'self-portraits'. Townsend in fact argues that, "if the conventional understanding of the self-portrait is that it states 'this is who I am' then we can see these pictures as an announcement that 'I am another'" (2006, p.57). It is true that in many of the published images which feature her own body, rather than that of a model, Woodman is often looking away from the camera, or has her face hidden or the image presents her face as distorted or blurred. As was alluded to in chapter 3, within the genre, the absence of a clear portrayal of the 'face', of a recognisable 'sign' of a potentially knowable, concrete individual does not seem to undermine their categorical status as self-portraiture. But it does raise the question whether the object of the image is a body/any body or whether Woodman is both the object and/or the subject of the image? In the commentary on her friend's work, Berne comments:

"Francesca was ashamed that she took so many pictures of herself and was irritated by the simplistic self-portrait label attached to her work...but she alone knew what she was after...and she was the one who was always available." (Betsy Berne, in Townsend, 2006, p.247)

The ambiguity of an image produced by the 'artist' using her or his own concrete form as subject or object perhaps has particular resonance in the context of photography, which still retains a lingering sense of 'truth' value - of indexicality.⁵³ As Barthes argues:

"In photography I can never deny that the thing has been there...no painted portrait, supposing that it seemed 'true' to me, could compel me to believe its

⁵³ See footnote 18 above for Pierce's distinction between the index, icon and symbol. Photographic portraiture's indexicality arises at least in part from the mechanical process: "the action of light on certain circumstances...the formation of the image through an optical device" (Barthes, 2000 [1980] p.10) and which (in theory at least) requires the "coincident presence" of camera, subject and photographer (Soussloff, 2006).

referent had really existed." (Barthes, 2000 [1980] p.76-77, emphasis in original)

Thus, despite the apparently contingent availability of her own body, and Woodman's own frustrations at seeing her work labelled as self-portraiture, as Sundell (1994), suggests:

"It is hard not to read these works...as an on going series of self-portraits, a map of the artist's own evolution – both as a potential object of others' desire and as a creator of images." (Sundell, 1994, p.435)

Other commentators too, suggest that it was not just pragmatism or convenience that drove Woodman to "obsessively" photograph herself, but was a means of "examin[ing], or perhaps affirm[ing] her identity" (Badger, 2012, p.10). For Badger (2010), however, the 'identity' represented is her specifically *artistic* identity, or what Bronfen (2014) describes as "the image she has composed of and for herself" (p.16). Townsend (2006), while critical of those who would subsume all Woodman's work within the category of self-portraiture, does not exclude the connectedness between the image and a "human original" (Brilliant, (2002 [1991])), but sees the images as positioned both as within the genre and (*contra* Barthes) a critique of it: "In Woodman's self-portraits we have a thoroughgoing critique of her medium's incapacity to identify a subject truthfully" (Townsend, 2006, p.56). Arguably, what this indirectly alludes to is a distinction, at the heart of portraiture (see chapter 3) between identity as physical 'likeness' and identity as the 'essence' of the person represented. Within Woodman's work, the former is present ([she] "has been there" – to paraphrase Barthes (2000 [1980])), but it is the latter that, because of its apparent performative quality (in the sense of a knowing performance) that is viewed as fugitive, mutable and contestable.

5.4 The two images

5.4.1 Making an exhibition of the self



Figure 5.2
Francesca Woodman
Untitled
Providence Rhode Island, 1975-1978
Silver Gelatin Estate print

"[Elsewhere] the subject of the work is established in disestablishment, in separating itself from the obvious ('What we see') and instead proposing itself as equivalent to some other object, to space itself, or to the ethereal. Woodman makes herself equivalent to a museum collection of stuffed animals, awkwardly crammed and jumbled, spilling out of a vitrine..." (Townsend, 2006, p.7)

"Woodman's art is a...troubling and troubled one. Ridden with menace, its lapidary beauty and elegance function as a kind of lure. Nowhere is this clearer than in the numerous series that enact tableaux of entrapment, engulfment or absorption of the woman in those spaces...here the reified condition of the feminine as aesthetized object is made utterly explicit, as are the stakes. Variations on this theme include...[one] in which the corpse like body of the model spills out of a Natural History display cabinet filled with stuffed specimens, birds, a raccoon." (Solomon-Godeau, 1991 [1986]), p.252)

Figure 5.2, *Untitled 1975-1978, Providence Rhode Island*⁵⁴ comprises one of a number of images Woodman created using museum cases or vitrines, often depicting nudes (either herself and/or other models) squeezed into or against the glass casing. This particular image was made in the Rhode Island School of Design nature laboratory, which held cases of stuffed animals and scientific specimens (Keller, 2011).

In this image Woodman, as model, is positioned both within, but falling out of, or emerging from, a museum cabinet that she shares with stuffed birds and mammals. The display cabinet has four glass doors, three of which are closed. The fourth door has been 'pushed' or forced open by the model/Woodman who is squeezed uncomfortably into the confined space on the bottom right shelf, lying on her side with most of her curled body still contained within/constrained by the cabinet, one foot overlapping another, but with her head lying on the door frame. The model/Woodman wears a patterned dress of dark shapes (possibly leaves) on a pale background, but her legs are bare. Only one shoulder is visible. Her eyes are closed as if asleep or dead (yet it is the truly dead, the stuffed animals, who's eyes are open).

⁵⁴ Many of Woodman's individual images are 'Untitled', though a number, such as figure 5.1, are part of entitled series such as *Self-deceit*'. See Fisher (1984) for a discussion of the implications (for interpretation) of titles.

Compositionally, the sides and shelves of the square museum cabinet generate strong horizontal and vertical lines. Its contents, however, produce a 'zig-zag' effect of right facing mammals and left facing birds and a human figure whose body is lying right to left, but whose neck and head face left to right as the model/Woodman breaches the boundaries, Gulliver-like, of the small animal display and tumbles out, hair flowing over the edge of the cabinet and onto the wooden floor, gaining, in Bronfen's words, "a peculiar tangible quality" (2014, p.22). The top left hand side display case (from the position of the viewer) comprises stuffed birds (facing right) and feathers of other bird types. The lower left hand side cabinet shelf displays a raccoon seemingly in mid bark/bite and whose positioning suggests that the object of its rage is the human animal on the lower right hand display shelf. On the shelf immediately above the model/Woodman is a stuffed fox – whose open jaws mirror and are diagonally related to those of the raccoon's. The fox's 'gaze' focuses on a point just beyond the model's feet. Above the fox more stuffed birds, facing leftwards, but whose heads are not visible because of the way the photograph has been cropped.

The light appears to come from the left reflecting on and elongating the model's neck making it appear swan-like, and creating tantalising reflections in the glass doors of the cabinet; tantalising because the reflections suggest but do not reveal the parameters or substance of the room beyond. This includes hints or traces of the mechanics of taking the photograph (is there someone else in the room, someone who's shadow may be in the reflection on the glass door enclosing the fox?)

The contrasting light and dark of the model's skin and the dark frame of the cabinet and the background of the raccoon's cabinet perhaps generate the sense of 'menace', alluded to by Solomon-Godeau above; the shaft of light on one part of the model's pale neck both makes it stand out and draws attention to the fact that it is almost in direct line to the raccoon's open mouth.

The eye line (of the viewer) is not at full adult height but the position of someone bending down to take a closer look at what is on display on the lower shelves of the cabinet. This level positions the viewer as a viewer of the exhibit as well as of the photograph.

At a surface level the content suggests both the warmth of nostalgia and the chill of capture or entrapment. History, or the past is evoked by the age of the museum cabinet with its battered, dark wood frame, and its 'traditional' museum display of stuffed, dusty animals 'captured' in poses as if in the wild (even in the late 1970s this would probably have seemed an archaic display mode). The concept itself perhaps refers further back to the idea of the *cabinet of curiosities* or *Kunstkammer*, rooms or cabinets containing collections of stuffed birds or animals, paintings, or 'curious objects' perhaps brought back from overseas explorations.⁵⁵ As in the cabinets of curiosities, the stuffed animals in Woodman's cabinet represent 'Natural History'.

Beyond these formal 'aesthetic codes' of light, form and surface content, is the scope for interpretation, as illustrated by the two quotes that open this sub-section. Woodman herself is largely silent on what she sought to achieve or intended by these or other images. For Townsend (2006) who seeks to wrest analyses of Woodman's work away from 'extra-aesthetic' considerations of biography and feminism, to address the specifically 'aesthetic' contribution of her oeuvre, this particular image is illustrative of Woodman's project to use self-representation to critique photography as a medium. According to Townsend, "With Woodman's art the medium that is most concerned with showing us what is indisputably there becomes preoccupied with hesitation, with uncertainty and with a displacement of forms" (Townsend, 2006, p.7). Thus, in this image she makes herself "equivalent to a museum collection". Keller, too, who aims for a more 'formalist' interpretation of this work, locates it within Woodman's concern with "the relationship of the body to space" ((2011, p.177), while Krauss

⁵⁵ <http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/mark-dion-tate-thames-dig/wunderkammen> (accessed 5 March 2015).

(1999 [1986])) sees it as one response to a problem set for students to define a particular space

The feminist perspective, from which Townsend seeks to distance Woodman's work, is exemplified by Solomon-Godeau for whom the sense of entrapment, of menace and of being 'in captivity' generated by figure 5.2 could be read as a feminist critique of women's estate under patriarchy. It could be interpreted as coupling the idea of the frozen in time, or 'mortifying' effect of photography (Barthes, 2000 [1980]; Metz, 1991) with the idea of the 'to-be-looked-at-ness' of women (Mulvey, in Solomon-Godeau (1991 [1986], p.245) or of 'self-objectivication' (Sundell, 1994). For Bronfen (2014), for whom Woodman's aesthetic self-fashioning of the body both "suspends but also perpetuates death" (p.11), this image illustrates "the symbolic equation between lifeless objects and the artist staging herself" (Bronfen, 2014, p.22). It could be said to articulate or reinforce the 'Otherness' of women: half in the animal world and half in the world of humans, a curiosity to the (masculinist?) gaze, a form of Natural History estranged or strange but also in need of containment. Yet, the model/Woodman has breached the cabinet's frame: has she been 'captured' or liberated; is she being squeezed into or emerging from the cabinet? Or is all of this too pofaced, too serious – is Woodman (just) making a visual joke?

This realisation of the wit behind the image (whatever scope it offers for also being (interpreted as) potentially transgressive and/or as potentially disturbing) has the effect of drawing attention to the constructed nature of the image, of the pose and, by extension to the existence of a concrete producer who is also the 'model'.

What, for me, created the sense of a 'thereness', a sense of a self or selves behind the image and which also generates the 'punctum' (loosely defined) or arrest, is the model/Woodman's hair, overflowing the display cabinet (something that also attracts the attention of Bronfen (2014) and Krauss (1999 [1986])). No doubt partly a visual effect by being at the centre of the photograph and extending beyond the horizontal plane created by the base

of the cabinet, it's arrangement draws attention to both Woodman as the producer of the image and as a (similarly) constructed 'subject' (a woman with long, dark hair) 'captured' for and by the camera. In other words, its positioning calls attention to itself, and, by extension, to the/a producer who is also Woodman.

This is not to posit a unitary subject/artist identified as 'Woodman': there are different 'Woodman's' at play, the photographer, the 'model', the concrete individual located in time and space with an individual and social history, and as a body with its own (constituted) 'Natural History' prior to and post the construction of the image. Rather, it is to argue that the hair draws attention to the fact that Woodman's body is present and that a 'self' /Woodman is both constructing (concretely) and performing the pose. This 'fiction of the pose', (Berger, 1994) and the knowing-ness of its construction, together with what it opens on to in terms of interpretation, paradoxically recuperates the presence of 'a' subjectivity, if not 'the' subjectivity'.

5.4.2 An equivalence of forms



Figure 5.3
Francesca Woodman
Untitled
New York, 1979-80
Silver Gelatin Estate Print

"In these pictures Woodman establishes an equivalence of forms: the pattern of the plastic fishbone she holds...is almost identical to the herring-bone structure of wire laid into the wall beside which she stands...[also an] equivalence between the fishbone, the wire mesh and fern pattern of Woodman's dress...Woodman is not fantasising about being other in a performance of identity, she is positing her body as part of her milieu...That body is an integral element of the space (and time) in which it projects itself as a separate and autonomous identity." (Townsend, 2006, p.57)

"The examination of limits in Woodman's work finds its structure largely through the principle of analogy...Woodman stands in front of a dilapidated wall, facing away from the camera. She wears a vintage dress decorated with a leaf pattern, its back cut away to expose her flesh. Against her back she holds a fish skeleton that serves as a visual analogue to her spine, the design of the dress, and a horizontal band of wall where the plaster and paint have chipped away to reveal the surface's infrastructure." (Sundell, 1994, p.436)

Whether called "analogy" (Sundell, 1994) or "equivalence of forms" (Townsend, 2006), the 'studium' of the image (figure 5.3), for me, comes from the 'puns' being played out between the model/Woodman's spine, the fishbone she holds, the herring bone pattern of the wire mesh in the plasterwork, and skeletal qualities of the ferns on her dress – all of which not only share visually similar structural qualities but, also (maybe because of these structural qualities) in different ways hold things together/hold things upright. Again suggesting, as in figure 5.2, a visual sense of humour.

Compositionally too figure 5.3 repays close scrutiny: the verticals of the model/Woodman, the pleat of her hair, the fishbone she holds against the exposed skin of her back, her hand holding the fish skeleton, the splits in the back of her dress and overdress and the light-revealed right leg, counterpointing the horizontals created by the wire mesh under the plaster work – the chevron shapes also mirroring the chevron of the spines of the fishbone. The way the model/Woodman positions her arms also creates two rough chevron shapes: the arm bent to hold the fishbone against her spine creating one; the arm held against the wall on which she rests her head creating a second. This pose also generates two diagonals: through the hands, and through the elbows.

Approximately two thirds of the photograph comprises the crumbling light coloured plasterwork, the model/Woodman is positioned to the left-hand side. The position of the viewer is lower than that of the model/Woodman, as if kneeling (at some distance away) and looking slightly upwards towards the square of wall. A small part of Woodman's dress on the left has been cropped from the photograph, as have her legs just above the knee – as if the (visual) priority was to get as much of the wall in the image as possible. The light appears to come from behind and to the left of the model/Woodman, lighting her back and the fishbone and much of the wall to reveal the crumbling, dented and defaced plasterwork. The model/Woodman's left leg is in shadow, and she herself creates shadows on the wall to her right – shadows which echo her shape. Her 'vintage' dresses create their own oppositions of light and dark: the light over-dress with its pattern of ferns and the dark under-dress (or possibly skirt) with its own patterning, possibly of leaves. The costume and the crumbling wall also, as in figure 5.2 generate a quality of nostalgia.

Figure 5.3 is one of a pair of images (see figure 5.4 below). Of the two images it was this one in which Woodman has her face to the wall that I kept being drawn back to. Partly a matter of personal 'taste': the second image, with its blurry fashioning of the dress felt a bit too 'romantic' and the referencing of the fishbone and the herring-bone of the wire mesh under the plasterwork a bit too 'obvious'. But there was also undoubtedly something about the way the model/Woodman is presented in figure 5.3 (again reflecting a personal response) that went beyond composition/formal considerations (though these are what manufacture the impact) to suggest pathos. The image of a figure with its head against a wall, 'pushed' away to one side of the image, almost out of the picture, however 'beautifully' composed (with the emphasis on the active nature of 'composition'), provokes a sense of abjectness, and with it, an empathetic response in the viewer. Insofar as Woodman posits her body as integral to the milieu, but as a separate and autonomous identity (to paraphrase Townsend (2006)), the identity projected is as fragile as the wall against which it seeks support.

Ironically, however, what gave the picture its 'punctum', was not the sadness it provoked (and again this is the response of a viewer aware of Woodman's subsequent biography), but the delicacy with which the model/Woodman holds the fish skeleton. Its delicacy and positioning drawing attention to both the feint that would seek to deny the fictions of the image, and to the self that performs and produces this feint.

5.5 Between imaged and image

5.5.1 Francesca Woodman (1958 – 1981): the blank on the page

Before going on to explore the evaluative commentary on Woodman's work it is worth giving a brief account of her biography, which plays such a significant part in the reception and interpretation of the images, that is in constituting both Woodman and a 'Woodman'.

The artist was born in April 1958 in Denver, Colorado, and died in New York in January 1981. Both her parents were artists, as was her brother. Her biography, presented in Townsend's monograph, principally lists the schools Woodman attended (including Rhode Island School of Design) and the places she stayed at, including one year in Rome (Townsend, 2006). It is perhaps the most poignant 'image' of the artist: half the page is blank

From her first self-portrait taken at age 13 years, Woodman produced in the region of 800 photographic images, predominantly in black and white. As late as the 2000s it was believed that only a selection of her images had been made public, with implications for how the body of work as a whole could be read. Townsend, writing in 2006, for example suggests that only around 120 images had been published or exhibited. Bryan-Wilson, writing in 2011, however, argues that most of Woodman's output has been issued.

5.5.2 Framing Woodman: evaluative constitution

"Woodman has been recognised widely as an artist only posthumously, a fact that places her by the generically feminine act of ceding control over commercial interaction with audience...This places her in a problematically feminine position...so that even as Woodman's powerful work itself militates

against this particular passive position one notes the dissonance between Woodman's masterful art and the powerless position from which she must approach us: through survivors." (Raymond, 2010, p.10)

As Keller (2011) notes, there is a lack of contemporary responses to Woodman's work by people who did not know how her life would end. In addition, outwith contemporaneous letters and notes, Woodman's scope to position and frame readings of her own work were limited, unlike the artists discussed in chapters 6 and 7 below. This places her and her work, as Raymond (2010) suggests, in a particularly "passive...and...powerless position". Into this 'vacuum' readings of her work have been largely shaped by (and in response or reaction to), the first art historical commentaries on her work, published in a catalogue in 1986 (five years after Woodman's death), to accompany the first curated show of Woodman's work held at the Wellesley College Museum, Boston, (now the Davis Museum at Wellesley College) and Hunter College Art Gallery (New York) (Gabhart, 1986). According to Bryan-Wilson (2011), the catalogue essays written by the co-curator Ann Gabhart and two high profile art historians of the period, Abigail Solomon-Godeau (1991 [1986]) and Rosalind Krauss (1999 [1986]), have in different ways structured subsequent commentaries on Woodman's work (and Woodman). Reflecting the images' multi-valency within and across time these broadly comprise (often in combination) feminist/psychoanalytic readings (building on Solomon-Godeau); formalist readings (from Krauss); and biographical readings.

Although acknowledging that Woodman did not explicitly describe herself as a feminist artist, in her 1986 essay "*Just Like a Woman*" Solomon-Godeau (1991 [1986]), nonetheless, as suggested above, argues for a feminist reading of her work and what it reveals of the operation of sexual difference and "the problems of feminine subjectivity and creativity" (p.244). Subsequently Solomon-Godeau's reading has been critiqued as itself a product of its time – predating, for example, a move away from essentialist categories toward ideas of performativity and multiplicity (Bryan-Wilson, 2011; Butler, 2006 [1990]), however, it remains a constant, albeit internally divergent thread (see, for example, Bleeke, 2010; Bronfen, 2014; Liu, 2004; Posner, 1998;

Riches, 2004). Liu (2004) for example, proposes “a feminist/psychoanalytic reading of Woodman’s formation of feminine space and subjectivity in order to elucidate the sexual politics of her self-representation” (p.26) – seeing images such as figure 5.3 above as “exhibiting [Woodman’s] longing for a fantasmatic fusion with the womblike environment”(p.29). Others, however, reject the implied passivity or vulnerability of some feminist readings (see for example, Pedicini, 2012; Raymond, 2010; Townsend, 2006).

Woodman’s active role in ‘performing’ and constructing the images in which she appears is also the thread that runs through the emphasis on the formal properties of her work. Beginning with Krauss’s (1991 [1986]) analysis of the formal, ‘objective’ qualities of Woodman’s work – the way she resolved “problem sets”, subsequent (and more recent commentators) have seen Woodman’s work as about explorations of forms of time and space using and within the photographic medium (Badger, 2012; Raymond, 2010; Townsend, 2006). So, for example, figure 5.2 can be read as an exploration of space (Keller, 2011), or as an interrogation of the Kantian sublime (Raymond, 2010) rather than (or solely as) expressing feminist confinement.

These readings emphasise the photographic medium: the technology Woodman used; concerns with issues of ‘space’ within the image and within the confined space constructed by the photographic ‘frame’; the ‘blur’ as a means for capturing (the passing of) time (rather than as an effacing of the self); and the degree of planning and staging of the images and selection of the prints. According to Keller (2011), Woodman was not ‘obsessed’ with the camera or print technology. The medium format camera she used, which was already out of date at the time she was working, produced a square negative and a small 6 x 6 cm print. This creates its own visual effects:

“Through playing the stability of the architectural square against the mutability of the body...Woodman exploited the powerful psychological charge that the inherent tension in the format provides.” (Keller, 2011, p.179)

The spatial qualities of the square format print – the physical frame of the artefact, and of the spaces she photographed are also given emphasis in this consideration of form, even if it also again alludes to the “tension” between the physical body and the physical space in which it is located (as in figure 5.2), or within the physical frame of the photographic image:

“Whether or not the location in the photograph was an interior or an exterior, the most important thing about it was the space marked by the edges of the picture-frame...This was the real space in which she set her figures, bounded by a square, the limits of the photographic negative...The frame’s edge matters so much more to a photographer than a painter because it represents the bounds of the world you have captured.” (Badger, 2012, p.11)

The other formal issue is that of the ‘blur’, of the representation of the figures in the image as if in motion, or disappearing from the picture frame. For commentators who would emphasise the more active constructed nature of these images, the creation of a sense of movement using a technology that, by its nature generates stasis, is read not as a denial of self, or dissolution of ego boundaries (Posner, 1998), but as an experiment or critique of the medium’s immobilization of time (see, for example, Badger, 2012; Townsend, 2006). For Raymond, the blur expresses an active “formal gesture”:

“Often read as suicidal emblems, her characteristic use of blur and self-violating cropping in fact are methods that Woodman deploys to query geometry’s relationship to vision and must be read for that formal gesture...Woodman’s manipulation of shutter speed to create images of herself as a blurred figure, or her use of a square format or cropping of images of herself without a head...is not the disappearance of Woodman’s self, but a shifting of the mechanism of the frame itself, and a shifting of the mechanism of audience as the implied limit of photography.” (Raymond, 2010 p.13, p.15, emphasis in original)

Townsend (2006) points to the way photographs are structured not just by what they contain, but what they exclude. This is what Metz (1991) describes as the “off frame space” – the “character” that is excluded but present. What the emphasis on the formal, constructed character of Woodman’s work points to, outwith the frame is the ‘artist-creator’ - the hand that presses the camera shutter. A theme emergent across commentaries is the degree to which the images were pre-planned, often quite meticulously. The works are

seen as *self-staged, performances, orchestrated* creations of 'Woodman' the performer by Woodman the photographer (Badger, 2012; Bronfen, 2014; Keller, 2011; Pedicini, 2012; Raymond, 2010).

"The ephemerality of appearance may be the central theme of her photographic work and yet the placement of her body, along with the objects surrounding it, is as minutely calculated as the framing of the scene, the lighting and the movement captured." (Bronfen, 2014, p.23)

This duality between the imaged and the creator of the image, between artist and model, is clearly a defining characteristic of self-portraiture, but with it comes the overlap, or flip flop between an evaluation of the image qua image, and 'evaluation' of the imaged, between the image viewed as performance and the image as constitutive/performative. While more formal analyses may not be solely divorced from concerns with the "psychological", or with identity and subjectivity, these approaches locate these effects within Woodman's 'exploitation' of her medium, and her role as an 'artist' rather than as solely representations of her psychic state. This latter, however, is given greater weight among those commentators who would view Woodman's work through the lens of her premature death. Although the catalogue accompanying her first major (posthumous) exhibition played down her death, by only making a reference to it at the end of the publication (Bryan-Wilson, 2011; Gabhart, 1986), it has been a common theme, even by way of rejecting this reading. Phelan (2002), for example argues that many of Woodman's images are to prepare the audience for her eventual death, repetitively staging her own disappearance:

"Woodman found in her art a type of theatre for the oscillating tension between the desire to live and the desire to die. Perhaps on Jan 19 1981 she found a composition that suited her, and she developed it into an act of suicide...in many of her photographs she traces her own disappearance in order to show her viewers that just as they can survive looking at her images when she has left the surface of the print, so they too can survive not looking at her when she leaves life's visible surface." (Phelan, 2002, p.999)

A similar focus on her "suicide vision" is to be found in Bleeke (2010), Kroker and Cook (1988 [1986]), for example, as well as inflecting interpretations of

her ostensible desire to disappear from the picture frame (see for example, Liu, 2004; Posner, 1998). Other readings seek to re-instate Woodman's hold on life, and thus, by implication allude to her death. Bronfen (2014), for example argues that Woodman's work can be seen not "only" as "anticipating and rehearsing death" but also "to celebrate a precarious recovery of aesthetic presence" (Bronfen, 2014, p.15).

Townsend argues that interpretations of each photograph as anticipating or as a presentiment of her death "is a particularly facile, romanticizing and unpleasant argument" (2006, p.8). Raymond (2010) similarly rejects what Bryan-Wilson (2011) describes as the trend in art history to read work depicting an artist's body as biographical. Yet, even over 30 years after her death, reviews of recent exhibitions of her work both draw attention to her death while ostensibly wanting to separate it from the art. Gumpert (2011), Johnson (2012), Smyth (2014) and Steinhauer (2012) all open their newspaper and journal articles by referencing the early death of the artist – Gumpert (2011) even describes how the means of her death left Woodman "unrecognizable". Steinhauer (2012), in fact argues that attempting to separate Woodman's art from her life is "impossible". What arguably has also become impossible is separating what Smyth (2014) calls the attendant "baggage" about both Woodman's life and the "heavy symbolism" read into her work, from the on-going, self-perpetuating process of institutional consecration.

5.6 Institutional Consecration: 'Portrait of a reputation'⁵⁶

"'Francesca Woodman' the name has become a title under the rubric of which is organized exclusively posthumous work." (Raymond, 2010, p.11)

The artist held only two solo exhibitions in her lifetime and contributed to four group exhibitions. Subsequently the number of solo and group exhibitions has increased almost exponentially. As noted earlier, the first posthumous exhibition was organised in 1986 by Ann Gabhart, the director

⁵⁶ This is the title of an artist's book by Woodman containing five images.

of the Wellesley College Museum.⁵⁷ The apparently contingent nature of the discovery or recuperation of Woodman's work is alluded to by Johnson (2012) who describes how Gabhart saw some prints of her work in the family home about a year after the artist's death. This conjunction may reflect the fact that both Woodman's parents were themselves established artists, and while 'chance', also suggests the operation of the field of cultural production and the connections between agents within the field (Bourdieu, 2004; Grenfell and Hardy, 2003).⁵⁸ In the 1986 exhibition catalogue, Gabhart describes how both the formal qualities of Woodman's work, together with her capacity to act as a role model for the female students of the college (Wellesley is a women's college) attracted her to the work:

"When I eventually decided to introduce this work in an exhibition organized for Wellesley I was mindful of the special relevance it has for our students; done by an artist their age, it deals with some of the most disturbing issues faced by young women in their formative years." (Gabhart, 1986, p.6, quoted in Keller, 2011, p.170)

In other words, the process of positioning Woodman within the field of cultural production starts taking shape with the conjunction of a key 'actor' in the field, evaluating the formal properties of the work, but also engendering the construction of the myth of the (female) artist 'Woodman'.

Subsequently there has been a ceaseless flow of exhibitions, including consecration at what might be considered the high altar of American art institutes including, latterly, The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (November 2011 – February 2012) and the Guggenheim Museum, New

⁵⁷ Wellesley College, located 12 miles outside Boston, describes itself as "*A private, non-profit liberal arts college for women*". It was established in 1875 (<http://www.wellesley.edu/about/wellesleyfacts>. (accessed 13 March 2015).

⁵⁸ The contingent nature of consecration or canonization is perhaps something that is worth further exploration. Parallels could be drawn with the 'discovery' of the photography of Eugène Atget following a 'chance' meeting between the surrealist photographer Man Ray and his assistant Berenice Abbott when they were in Paris in the late 1920s (Baldwin et al, 2000). Atget's work features in Benjamin's analyses of the impact of reproductive technology on the work of art (Benjamin, 1999 [1936], 2009 [1931])). A more recent example might be the discovery of the 'street photographer' Vivian Maier whose work was found in a job lot of auctioned storage boxes. (<http://www.vivianmaier.com/> (accessed 13 March 2015).

York (March – June 2012) (see Keller et al, 2011). Recent exhibitions have been held in the UK and in Vienna (see Schor and Bronfen, 2014).

In addition to her life and work being used as the basis for a video (Subrin, 2000), it has also been the focus of a number of recent monographs or books (see, for example, Keller et al (2011), Pedicini (2012), Raymond (2010), Schor and Bronfen, 2014). All of which suggests that there has been no diminution of interest in Woodman's work, 30 years after her death. Without wishing to go wholly down the institutional path to explain this continued interest in her work there are undoubtedly, 'extra-aesthetic' factors at play – the continuing presence of her parents (and boyfriend – Benjamin W. Moore) as holders/controllers of Woodman's estate, for example, appear to be key in sustaining the consecration process. All the books and monographs consulted formally acknowledge the support received from 'Betty and George Woodman' who, "have managed her estate, devotedly preserving, protecting and promoting their daughter's work..." (Raymond, 2010, p.11). The family as a whole has also been subject of a documentary film, *The Woodmans*, released in 2011 (Willis, 2010). Centred on Woodman's work, the film includes interviews with her parents talking about their own work – potentially adding to and extending the myth of (the) Woodman(s). An American television news producer C. Scott Willis produced the film. According to Gumpert (2011) Scott Willis did not know Woodman's work but had a 'chance' meeting with her parents at a brunch held by his cousin. Although contingency plays its part, it again arguably illustrates the indirect operation of the field in bringing together agents with similar cultural capital.

As Johnson (2012) notes, there are also commercial interests at stake in the form of Woodman's management, the prestigious Marian Goodman Gallery, based in New York.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ <http://www.mariangoodman.com/artists/francesca-woodman/> (accessed 13 March 2015).

To help maintain the “circle of belief” (Bourdieu, 2004) that surrounds Woodman’s work, it is located both within existing lineages, but also seen as so distinctive, as to be the progenitor of its own lineage. Referencing back, links are made between Woodman’s work and Surrealism, particularly through her use of ‘props’ to create assemblages or *tableaux vivants*, in which each object is given equal weight (Bronfen, 2014; Pedicini, 2012; Riches, 2004). Emphasis is also placed on her connection, when on a study year in Italy, with a bookshop with a specific interest in Surrealist material (Liu, 2004; Pedicini, 2012; Riches, 2004). Woodman’s work is, however, seen as “diluting” or “deforming” Surrealism by mediating it through the artistic forms of the 1970s and undercutting its misogyny/masculinist gaze (Pedicini, 2012; Posner, 1998; Solomon-Godeau, 1991 [1986]). Her work is also seen as a continuation of both a form of Pictorialism (Badger, 2012), a style of photographic work from the late 19th and 20th Century drawing on a fine art aesthetic⁶⁰ and traditional “straight photography” pioneered by American photographers such as Paul Strand, Edward Steichen and Walker Evans (Pedicini, 2012).

Locating Woodman within a contemporary (1970s) American context a number of commentators see links between her work and that of the photography of Duane Michals, particularly its seriality and the use of text ((Johnson, 2012; Pedicini, 2012) and with the earth-body sculptures of the Cuban-American performance artist Ana Mendieta (Baker et al, 2003; Johnson, 2012; Posner, 1998). Resonances are also found with or in the work of Cindy Sherman who was also experimenting with self-portraiture in the mid-1970s (Bryan-Wilson, 2011; Johnson, 2012; Steinhauer, 2012; Townsend, 2006).

But, like the images, Woodman’s work is seen as occupying an ambiguous position (Bryan-Wilson, 2011; Pedicini, 2012; Solomon-Godeau, 1991 [1986]); Townsend, 2006). The work is described as being both within and outwith modernism and post-modernist art movements (Badger, 2012; Townsend,

⁶⁰ http://www.moma.org/collection/details.php?theme_id=10161, (accessed 15 March 2015).

2006); and as having elements of performance art, in the use of the body, but distinct in using the performance in the service of the photography not vice versa (Pedicini, 2012). To absorb Woodman's "original signature style which defied classification by group or movement" (Pedicini, 2012 p.41) has led commentators to suggest that she effectively created her own lineage, one that is followed by others: "She has been enormously influential for subsequent generations of young artists and art students, particularly women" (Keller, 2011 p.170), to the extent that her style has generated its own clichés, both among art students (see, for example, a critique of the apparent appropriation and dilution of Woodman's genre among students in Baker et al (2003)) and in fashion photography (Bryan-Wilson, 2011; Gumport, 2011).

The question remains whether this process of institutional consecration is itself sufficient to account for the images' ostensible enduring appeal – is there still some residue, or supplement, beyond their production as a cultural object that, as individual images, retain their own 'thereness' (just as the image of the artist provokes a sense of 'presence') – their 'punctum', and can/how should this be engaged with sociologically?

5.7 Discussion

"In Michael Foucault's analysis of literary criticism, he argues that rather than lamenting the eclipse of the author, we should study the places in which his presence asserts itself and consider the creative act like an 'opening in space where the subject endlessly disappears'. The means of disappearance in Francesca Woodman's photography always refer back to the study of her own identity as a woman and as an artist in transformation, not in disintegration." (Pedicini, 2012, p.96)

"Woodman's photographs' distinctive combination of self-portrait, blur, a de-centering...intervene in notions of the centrality of the subject, that watchword of humanism, and significantly interrogate the problem of the gaze displaced from the body through the mechanism of photography." (Raymond, 2010, p.5)

"Wandering through the final room of the Guggenheim museum, I stopped in front of a mesmerizing self-portrait. In it Woodman is naked...She was

undeniably present." (Jillian Steinhauer (2012) The Paris Review, 23 May)

This case study was an attempt to explore how to develop and warrant an analysis of individual art objects that did not (solely) focus on ideological and institutional frameworks, but which also did not slip into making indefensible evaluative judgements. Further, and reflecting the specific focus on portraiture, the selected images provided an initial opportunity to consider how the critique of the ideological, discursive function of the 'subject' and 'subjectivity' played out in and between the art object and its institutional consecration.

Focusing on and describing the two selected photographic 'self-portraits' by Francesca Woodman provided space to consider what their form and content might provoke or prompt in viewers, and how they might achieve their effects as images – recognising that this analysis would be limited by my own and others' social, historical and disciplinary position. In fact, there may be an argument for saying that in attempting to find a way to describe the images the analysis was perhaps unwittingly drawn into using the vocabulary of the field. As such it both illustrates the difficulty of locating an 'outside' from which to talk about the images, but also risks reproducing (rather than critiquing) the operation of the field. Consideration was, however, given to the 'punctum' (Barthes, 2000 [1980]), as a way of understanding the arrest or disturbance that these images might generate: for me (as situated viewer) it was Woodman's hair in fig. 5.2 and the sense of a 'thereness' (of a concrete individual behind the image) that this evoked, in figure 5.3 my attention was drawn to the delicacy with which she holds the fishbone. While the punctum felt will not be 'universal' it is arguably a useful concept for articulating why or how a particular image may or more not work as an image, in a way that is potentially "intersubjectively defensible" (Harrington, 2004).

Paying close attention to the individual images, and considering their provocations and evocations qua images, also provided a productive starting

point for understanding the body of art historical evaluative commentary and critique which has developed around Woodman's work. In particular it underlined how these images' ambiguity afford multiple interpretations, and the fact that the photographs were published posthumously means that there really is no artist to attempt to fix their meanings. The two images which have been considered here, and others within Woodman's oeuvre, have been 'read' variously as: the means by which Woodman sought to 'disappear herself', or as a form of self-displacement, as "staged absence" (Riches, 2004); an articulation of feminine subjectivity and sexual difference (Solomon-Godeau, (1991) [1986]); an attempt to expose the fundamental 'untruthfulness' of photography's assumed indexicality (Townsend, 2006); or a way of resolving a technical 'Problem Set' (Krauss, 1999 [1986]). At one level, the evaluative commentary is a process of engaging in an intersubjective defence of the images. But, by formalising and institutionalising this multi-valency, couching it in the language of art historical discourse, these evaluative commentaries also begin the work of positioning Woodman's oeuvre critically within the field of restricted production (Bourdieu, 2004). In other words, the works acquire 'authority' or status as art works in the field by being critically evaluated by 'experts', even as they contest their different interpretations.

What this particular case study also demonstrates quite clearly is how the process of consecration and positioning unfolds and gathers pace through key actors, networks and institutions within the field. Thus, a 'chance' meeting between a college gallery curator (Ann Gabhart) and Woodman's artist parents, led to the first posthumous public exhibition, supported by a catalogue containing evaluative/interpretive essays by high status art historians (Rosalind Krauss and Abigail Solomon-Godeau). Subsequent commentators have either supported, or rejected these initial interpretations with their own alternative (historically and socially located) readings, further strengthening and consolidating Woodman's position within the field. This cultural snowball effect gathers further momentum from exhibitions of Woodman's work, including those held by 'prestigious' American art institutions. These exhibitions generate catalogues with further evaluative

commentary, thereby adding to the reputational weight of Woodman's oeuvre. The influence of the body of work on subsequent generations of photography students, and on fashion photography, diffuses the 'style', normalising or making it recognisable, even if a pastiche of the original. In addition is the continuing role of Woodman's parents and the gallery representing Woodman's work in maintaining the works' presence and visibility in the cultural field. In effect the 'circle of belief' (Bourdieu, 2004) around Woodman's work, once set in motion, has gathered its own momentum.

Cutting through it all is the "plurality of self" (Foucault, 1991a [1969]): the overlap or oscillation between 'Woodman' the artist, Woodman, the concrete individual and producer of the images (1958 – 1981) and Francesca Woodman as the subject of the self-portraits. A theme which emerged in this case study, but which will be seen in some form across all three, is the cross over, or 'flip flop', between evaluations of the image and evaluations of the imaged: between representation and a concrete, biographical individual. As discussed in chapter 3, this reflects one of portrait's 'paradoxes': its ambiguous space between 'art' and 'document'. The added dimension, in the context of self-portraiture is the overlap between the concrete individual, the 'artist' and the subject of the art object. Although not anticipated when the images were selected for inclusion, this case study revealed the operation of this oscillation in an extreme form through the way that the early death of Francesca Woodman mediated evaluative commentary on the work and the subject of the work.

In fact, in unanticipated ways, death came to haunt this case study. First, as alluded to in chapter 3, portraiture has, in its historical roots and in its function, been closely aligned with death. For Pointon (2013), for example, portraiture both creates and ruptures the illusion of permanence, of "death and corruption of the body [being] what happens to others elsewhere" (p.20). Further, rather than offering certainty of identity beyond death, it offers only mutability (Pointon, 2013). As the work of Woodman testifies, in the absence of Woodman the concrete individual, Woodman, or rather, different

Woodmans, come to be constituted by and through socially and historically located viewers.

Second, photographic portraiture in particular is seen as in some ways death dealing even when its subjects are alive (Barthes, 2000 [1980]). As Metz (1991) notes, photography is linked to death in a number of ways: symbolically, through the immobility and silence which they both share; through the practice of keeping photographs as reminders of those who have died; and, 'phenomenologically', even when the photograph is of someone still living, "the moment when he/she *was* has forever vanished...the person who has been photographed is in effect dead" (p.158).

But, as the discussion of the evaluative commentary on Woodman's work has revealed, the literal early death of the artist feeds into interpretations of both the 'intentions' of the artist and of the images (or, contrarily, through rejections of these readings). In other words, the biography of the concrete individual (the 'real photographer') becomes the prism for evaluating the work of Woodman the 'artist', and of Woodman the subject of the art. Thus Woodman's self-representations have been viewed by some as enacting (in the fullest sense of the word) her subsequent disappearance, or, against this, as (positive) acts of transformation, or "the creative product of Woodman the photographer" (Bronfen, 2014, p.25)

Ironically, what this perhaps suggests is that notwithstanding the theoretical critique of the 'subject' as constituted in discourse – what Raymond (2010) above refers to as the "watchword of humanism" (p. 5), the desire to identify a self, an "undeniabl[e] presence" (Steinhauer, 2012) retains its hold. Thus, even where there is an acceptance of the images as performances and performative, constructing or constituting identity, or identities, there remains, at the same time a desire to hang on to Francesca Woodman as the active creator; to identify in the work the 'authentic' hand of the 'real' Francesca Woodman. In effect Woodman is both an absence and a presence.

5.8 Conclusion

What the analysis of the two images by the photographer Francesca Woodman begins to suggest is the operation of two overlapping sets of relationships. First, the sets of relationships between what the images afford, the evaluation of the images and institutional networks of consecration. Second, throughout these sets of relationships the overlapping or oscillating relationship between the artist – ‘Francesca Woodman’, Francesca Woodman the concrete individual (1958 – 1981), and the self-portraits of a Francesca Woodman. In effect, Woodman the historical individual, overlaps with ‘a’ Woodman (as in, ‘a’ Picasso or ‘a’ Rembrandt), overlaps with the subject portrayed. Despite the intellectual rejection of the subject and subjectivity as a function of ideology, constituted in discourse, running through both sets of relationships is a continued yearning or desire for a ‘presence’, for recuperating a self behind the image and behind the artist-creator, a ‘thereness’ (Jones, 2006) within and outwith the picture plane. What this yearning seems to provoke is the constant re-appearance of the disappearing self (or selves)

It was by examining two images, employing the two framing devices of the ‘death’ of the subject/artist, and the ‘punctum’ (Barthes 2000 [1980]), that these two sets of relationships began to gain a foothold. That is, by considering these images as images, giving them space to generate their own affordances, albeit to a situated viewer, they opened on to questions of what and how they achieved their effects and how these effects may feed into (and be fed by) the processes of institutional consecration.

One of the ‘affordances’ that emerged unbidden (and unexplored) in this case study was the ‘abject’ nature of the two case study images: specifically a sense of things being out of place or of transgressing boundaries. To further explore the generative potential of the art object for sociological consideration this became the framing concept for the next case study.



Figure 5.4
Francesca Woodman
Untitled,
New York, 1979
Silver Gelatin Estate Print

6. (Con)frontality: The abject portrait

6.1 Introduction

Through the conceptual frames of the (theoretical) 'death' of the artist/subject and the punctum, the analysis of two photographs by Francesca Woodman, discussed in the previous chapter, were productive for beginning to suggest the complex relationships, both centrifugal and centripetal, between the sensuous properties of the portrait as a material object, its 'consecration' or otherwise as 'art' (and the producers as 'artists') and its role in fashioning or fixing a subjectivity. This chapter seeks to explore this emerging dynamic further through the prism of the 'abject portrait'. By this (admitted neologism) is meant those portraits that, in terms of how, who and what they represent, are potentially 'transgressive' in form and or in content.

Focusing on the sensuous properties of form, colour and composition provides an opportunity to explore the (socially and historically specific) affordances that these images of transgression evoke. Addressing these images as 'art' objects, allows an exploration of the potentially paradoxical effects of the production of work that ostensibly questions or breaches some aesthetic boundary, but as a 'ritual act of sacrilege' (Bourdieu, 2004) may serve to reinforce the field and, paradoxically, enhance the position of the producers within the field (Heinich, in Danko, 2008).

At the same time, considering the representations of those portrayed in these images opens on to an examination of the ways in and through which their subjectivities and identities come to be constituted or imputed through the processes of portrayal. In particular, focusing on the 'abject portrait' provides an opportunity to consider whether images which cross the 'boundary' and invoke the Other, that is portraits which seek to foreground the socially excluded, the transgressive, the non-normative, are potentially emancipatory, asserting the validity of difference, or, in a parallel move to the 'art world's' response to transgression, work to effectively reinforce the boundaries of the 'clean and proper' (Kristeva, 1982).

Through this analysis it will be suggested that to fully understand the dynamics between the portrait as sensuous material object, as a culturally and institutionally defined or classified art object, and as the representation of a living or once living subject, it is necessary to consider the relation between the producer of the images and the person(s) imaged. Further, and relatedly, this case study also allows for an exploration of the artist's voice (largely silent in the case of Woodman), in the construction of the aesthetic evaluation of the object and the constitution and evaluation of the artist's subjects. Following on from this it will be suggested that 'recognition' of the artist within the field of cultural production, and the incorporation of the object as 'art' is no guarantor of recognition of the imaged and may in fact perpetuate or constitute those portrayed in abjection.

The next section briefly sketches out the concept of the abject and how this has been absorbed into avant-garde art practice. This is followed by a detailed examination of each of the two images. What this examination reveals about the relationship between the sensuous object, the art object and the constitution of the subject is discussed in the final section.

6.2 Seeing abjection

6.2.1 Theorising abjection

In this chapter the concept of the 'abject' will provide the frame through which to view two photographic portraits. As a vehicle for, and articulation of, a critique of the 'civilizing process' (Elias, 1994 [1939]), the theoretical 'turn to the abject', to a consideration of the psychically and socially marginalized and normatively transgressive, develops from a number of different streams of Western European thought in the late 20th and 21st Century. To provide the context for the analysis this section provides a broad-brush overview of what is meant by the abject and how it has been applied within art criticism and art practice.

The theoretical development of the concept of the 'abject' reflects a concern to account for, and critique, the constitution in bourgeois Western society of the social and psychical hierarchy between the normative 'clean and proper'

(Kristeva, 1982) and the 'non-normative', excluded 'Other'. Intellectually it is part of what Murray and Murray (2006) describe as "the subaltern subject's emergence in the late 20th Century era of identity politics as *the* 'subject of history'" (p.26, emphasis in original). Three themes connect the different streams of thought from which the 'abject' emerges: the constitutive role of the 'non-normative'; the instability of the boundary between the normative and non-normative or transgressive (and the potential 'return of the repressed'); and the dual attraction and repulsion of the (socio-economically powerful) 'high' for the 'low' (Stallybrass and White, 1986).

In social anthropology Douglas (2007 [1966]) explores the role of 'Taboo' in protecting the boundary between order and disorder or "matter out of place": a patterning that, Douglas argues, occurs, in different ways across and within both non-Western and "modern" societies. This way of conceptualising the boundary between the clean and the polluting has its parallels in accounts of the emergence of the bourgeois *Homo Clausus* (Elias, 1994 [1939]). Drawing on the literature and art of the 17th Century, Barker (1984) describes the emergence, or rather the secreting away, of the 'tremulous private body' as the signifier of the development of a bourgeois subjectivity. Of a piece with the civilizing process described by Elias (drawing on Freud) as, the "movement of segregation...[the] hiding behind the scenes of what has become distasteful" (1994 [1939] p.99), the private body is one in which manifestations of corporeality such as faeces, urine, sweat, phlegm, blood, vomit, semen etc. must be hidden, denied, abjured, abjected, but always at risk of returning, of breaching the constructed boundaries of the 'clean and proper' (Kristeva, 1982 [1980]). But while that which is rendered abject, the excluded 'low', the constitutive 'Other', the bodily 'grotesque', provokes disgust it also provokes desire. For Stallybrass and White, for example,

"The bourgeoisie...is perpetually re-discovering the carnivalesque, as a radical source of transcendence. Indeed that act of rediscovery itself, in which the middle classes excitedly discover their own pleasures and desires under the sign of the Other, in the realm of the Other, is constitutive of the very formation of middle class identity." (Stallybrass and White, 1986, p.201)

Philosophical and psychoanalytical account of the construction of the fragile boundary between the normative and the transgressive can also be traced through the work of Bataille, specifically his concepts of the 'informe' and 'base materialism' and in Kristeva's seminal "Essay on Abjection" (1982).⁶¹

According to Foster (1996), for Bataille the 'informe' is a condition in which "significant form dissolves because the fundamental distinction between figure and ground, self and other, is lost" (p.112). This concern with the dissolution of form is also articulated in Bataille's concept of base materialism, his critique of the existing social hierarchies through a call for an "active base matter that disrupts the opposition of high and low and disrupts all foundations" (Noys, 1998, p.499).

Kristeva's (1982) essay develops the concept of the abject to account for the process of subject formation. As a process, the (unformed) subject must (symbolically) abject the mother to become whole, to become part of the symbolic order (of language) and the law of the father, "the abject is what I must get rid of to become an 'I' at all" (Foster, 1996, p.114). For Kristeva, 'proper' sociality and subjectivity can only be achieved by the expulsion of the "improper, the unclean, and the disorderly elements of its corporeal existence" (Gross, 1990, p.86). Although the abject is described as neither subject nor object, Kristeva (1982) nonetheless identifies three classes of abjects, against which taboos will be erected, and which, when encountered will provoke bodily disgust: these are food, waste and the signs of sexual difference. The exclusion of the abject is, however, only provisional and partial. For Kristeva,

"What must be expelled from the subject's corporeal functioning can never be fully obliterated, but hovers at the border of the subject's identity, threatening apparent unities and stabilities, with possible disruption and possible dissolution." (Gross, 1990, p.87)

⁶¹ For a more detailed examination of these concepts and the distinctions between them see for example, Foster, et al 1994; Foster, 1996; Gross, 1990; Krauss, 1996; Moi, 1986; Wirth, 1999.

Ross (1997) argues that, for Kristeva, “the bringing into play of the abject...is a critical practice that puts subjectivity into crisis; it is a work by which categories of identity are abruptly questioned, disrupted and challenged” (p.149). This critical potential is also alluded to by Murray and Murray (2006) who argue that, notwithstanding their differences (see, for example, Krauss, 1996), for both Bataille and Kristeva:

“Abjection operates on the level of the symbolic. Bodily excess, piss, shit, vomit, saliva and tears function to allegorize repression, shame and the construction of otherness.” (p.30)

This mapping out of the topographical boundaries between the ‘clean and proper’ and the threatening abject is further developed in the work of Judith Butler (1993) in her discussion of the constitution of ‘sex’ and the materiality of the body through the regulatory regime of normative heterosexuality. Reflecting the theme of the constitutive Other, for Butler, the ‘abject’ designates:

“Those ‘unliveable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of subject, but whose living under the sign of the ‘unlivable’ is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject.” (Butler, 1993, p.3)

For Butler, the construction of a normative heterosexuality is thus achieved through the exclusion or repudiation of homosexuality: homosexuality becomes heterosexuality’s abject.

6.2.2 The abject in art criticism

Kristeva (1982) argues that, historically, it has been a function of religion to purify the abject, but that with the disintegration of historical forms of religion the work of purification rests with the catharsis of art: the aesthetic task is “a descent into the foundations of the symbolic construct” (Creed, 1996 [1986], p.75).

But, in addition to this ‘aesthetic task’, through its articulation of the liminality and permeability of subject and object, of inside and outside,

abjection as concept and condition has been attractive to the avant-garde “who want to disturb these orderings of subject and society” (Foster, 1996, p.114). This can be seen particularly in the work in the 1990s of the authors associated with the *October* journal (Foster, et al 1994; Foster, 1996; Krauss, 1996). It has also provided the theoretical bases for analyses of contemporary art works through the prism of a politics of difference. A number of commentators, for example, have used the concept of abjection productively to theorise and critique the representation and constitution of female, queer and raced subjectivities in and through contemporary visual and performance art (see for example, Çakırlar, 2011; Campbell and Spackman, 1998; Creed, 1994; Dibosa, 2009; Erdrich, 2007; Gutiérrez-Albilla, 2008; Houser, 1993; Murray and Murray, 2006; Ross, 1997).

Murray and Murray (2006), however, in their analysis of the relationship between “identity formation and canon formation” also draw attention to the complex ways in which discourses of abjection can be a double-edged sword. While potentially an inclusionary move drawing attention to manifestations of oppression, it also has the potential to create a double abjection of minority art and artists through what Murray and Murray describe as a “hierarchical fragmentation of discourse”. By this they seem to suggest that a focus on aesthetic issues of form denies the potential for a ‘politics of identity’, while a focus on producing art objects as “vehicles for a particular political agenda” preclude consideration of their ‘aesthetic’ qualities, or what Murray and Murray (2006) describe as “the possibility of formulating an additional dimension of meaning and expression” (p.31).

6.2.3 The abject as art practice

Arguably, portraiture and the aesthetics of taste collude in marking the boundaries between the tasteful and distasteful, in terms of how the ‘self’ is represented in art, who and what constitutes a ‘clean and proper’ subject for art, and in terms of what constitutes ‘clean and proper’ art.

As the above, however, suggests, in some areas of 20th and 21st century visual art there has been an ostensible inversion of this relationship with the

emergence of an art that seeks to reveal and even revel in the body's corporeality, in the shit and blood and tears and urine without which there is no-body; and to place those at risk of social abjection and exclusion not in the 'dark side of the landscape' (Barrell, 1985 [1980]), but centre stage.

In the 20th Century⁶² this shift from an aesthetic of the object to an aesthetic of the abject as an ostensibly critical art practice, is 'canonised', in the American context at least, through two exhibitions held at the Whitney Museum of Modern Art in New York at the beginning of the 1990s: *Dirt and Domesticity: Constructions of the feminine*, held in 1992, and, in the following year *Abject art: Repulsion and desire in American art* (Krauss, 1996).⁶³ In the catalogue accompanying the 1993 exhibition, 'abject art' is described as not so much an art movement more as a body of work:

"Which incorporates or suggests abject materials such as dirt, hair, excrement, dead animals, menstrual blood and rotting food in order to confront taboo issues of gender and sexuality. This work also includes abject subject matters – that which is often deemed inappropriate by a conservative dominant culture." (Ben-Levi et al, 1993, p.7)

Described as drawing its "theoretical impulse", from Kristeva's notion of abjection and Bataille's concept of 'base materialism', this 'body of work' was seen by contemporary commentators such as Ben-Levi et al (1993) as a political movement, both in terms of its confrontation (by effect, if not design), with the canon and the art institution, and also beyond the institution in its ostensible engagement with 'extra aesthetic' issues of gender and sexuality.

"Employing the methodologies adapted from feminism, queer theory, post-structuralism, Marxism and psycho-analysis, our goal is to talk dirty in the institution and degrade its atmosphere of purity and prudery by

⁶² Although outwith the scope of the current study, there is an argument for saying that depictions of the abject/abjection have a far longer lineage within the European pictorial arts. In Western Christian iconography, depictions of the crucifixion per se, and the blood and physical trauma of the crucified body could, for example, be regarded as images of abjection.

⁶³ The timing of these two exhibitions perhaps accounts for the burgeoning theoretical literature on the abject in art criticism in the late 1990s.

foregrounding issues of gender and sexuality in the art exhibited." (Ben-Levi et al, 1993, p.7)

Within the field of portraiture, Cindy Sherman's photographic 'self portraiture' is frequently cited in analyses of 'abject art' (see for example, Foster, 1996; Krauss, 1996; Murray and Murray, 2006). But, arguably, the performance art of the 1960's and the body art of the 1970s/1980s, in which artists used their own bodies, often represented in pain or exposed to physical risk, could also be said to be a form of abject self-portraiture. This includes, for example, the work of Carolee Schneeman, Vito Acconci, and Orlan (see for example, Jones, 2006; Warr and Jones, 2000). This theme continues into the 1990s in the work of, for example, Hannah Wilkes who took photographic self-portraits while receiving treatment for cancer (Jones, 2006), or in the work of performance artist Franko B. with its "pervasive presence of blood" (Campbell and Spackman, 1998), and in the photographs of/by Catherine Opie of the effects of self-cutting images into her skin (Erdrich, 2007).

The use of the artist's own bodily effusions (or imputed bodily effusions) could be said to be the 'indexical' portrait par excellence, as in, for example, Piero Manzoni's *merda d'artista* – an art work produced in 1961 comprised of 90 sealed tins cans of the artist's excrement.⁶⁴ Mark Quinn's *Self* a series of frozen sculptures made between 1991 – 2006 using the artist's own blood, could also come within this 'genre', as perhaps could the detritus surrounding an unmade bed (Tracy Emin's *My Bed* made in 1998).

Late 20th century examples of portraits made by artists of the socially abject(ed) might include the photographic work of Diane Arbus whose 1972 show in New York "lined up assorted monsters and borderline cases-most of them ugly, wearing grotesque or unflattering clothing; in dismal and barren surroundings" (Sontag, 1984 [1977], p.32). The images by the American photographer, Nan Goldin, of both herself (including a self-portrait after having experienced physical abuse "*Nan, one month after being battered*, 1984),

⁶⁴ http://www.pieromanzoni.org/EN/works_shit.htm (accessed 13 June 2015).

and of drag queens, transsexuals and others within the New York sub-cultures of the 1980s, together with her images of the impact of AIDS, could also potentially fit within the category of the abject portrait. Painterly examples might include Marcus Harvey's portrait of the Moors Murderer Myra Hyndley shown at the *Sensation* exhibition in 1997. In the 21st Century, the 2010 exhibition *Hide/Seek: Difference and desire in American Portraiture* held at the National Portrait Gallery Smithsonian Institute in New York, continues the theme, with its specific focus on "sexual difference in the making of American Portraiture", including the influence on modern art of 'social marginalization'.⁶⁵

6.2.4 Gilbert and George: Dresie and Casie

The turn to the abject, to the inversion of hierarchies through the representation of the psychically and, or, socially excluded or 'transgressive', therefore provides a powerful prism through which to examine the complex relationships between the properties of the portrait as material object, its 'consecration' (or otherwise) as an 'art' object, and the implications for the constitution of the subjectivities and identities of those portrayed. The following explores these questions through an analysis of two images, which, though not necessarily self-defined (by their producers) as 'abject art', in their use of abject materials and (potentially) socially abjected subjects, might be said to come within this 'genre'. The first is a 'self portrait' by the artists Gilbert and George the second is a portrait of the twins Dresie and Casie, by the photographer Roger Ballen.

These two pictures have been selected for what they share: both are 'consecrated' art objects which include representations of abject 'subjects' (in both senses of the word), which enables an analysis of the implications of the 'abject portrait' within the context of the field of cultural production. But they have also been selected for their differences, in terms of the processes of

⁶⁵ <http://npg.si.edu/exhibit/hideseek/> (accessed 15 June 2015). The successful demand by the Catholic League to have one of the exhibits – a four minute video including an image of Christ on the cross being eaten by large black ants – withdrawn from show illustrates the continued 'threat' posed by the representation of the abject.

production and the control they afford over the presentation of self, enabling consideration of the implications of the mode and process of representation in the constitution of subjectivities.

6.3 Gilbert and George

6.3.1 Gilbert and George: Bloody Shit House

The first image (figure 6.1) comprises a collage of coloured photographs laid out on a grid of 12 equal sized squares (four columns by four rows). Areas of the grid in the 'background' not covered by the image(s) are white. At the centre of the grid – the length of the two central columns - is a photograph of two full-length, naked, white, grey-haired men standing close to each other, legs apart, arms at their sides. Both men are wearing wristwatches, one is wearing spectacles, neither is 'looking' directly at the viewer. The taller of the two men (on the right) faces the camera/viewer frontally but is looking upward behind his spectacles. The shorter man on the left is standing slightly diagonally to the picture plane, apparently staring into the middle distance to the right.

The photograph of the two men is superimposed in front of an 'archway' or 'doorway' comprised of photographs of three reddish brown cylindrical shapes: two uprights located at the right and left sides of the grid and one placed horizontally like a lintel across these, located at the top of the grid. The brown cylinders comprising the 'architrave' appear to be marked by black lines or striations, like cracks in stone, or the effect of marbling. In the space created by the 'doorway', and behind the two men, a reddish-brown background is criss-crossed by white lines like roads marked on a map. In the bottom right hand corner there is a typewritten legend in white on black enclosed in a white border. This bears the words 'BLOODY SHIT HOUSE'.

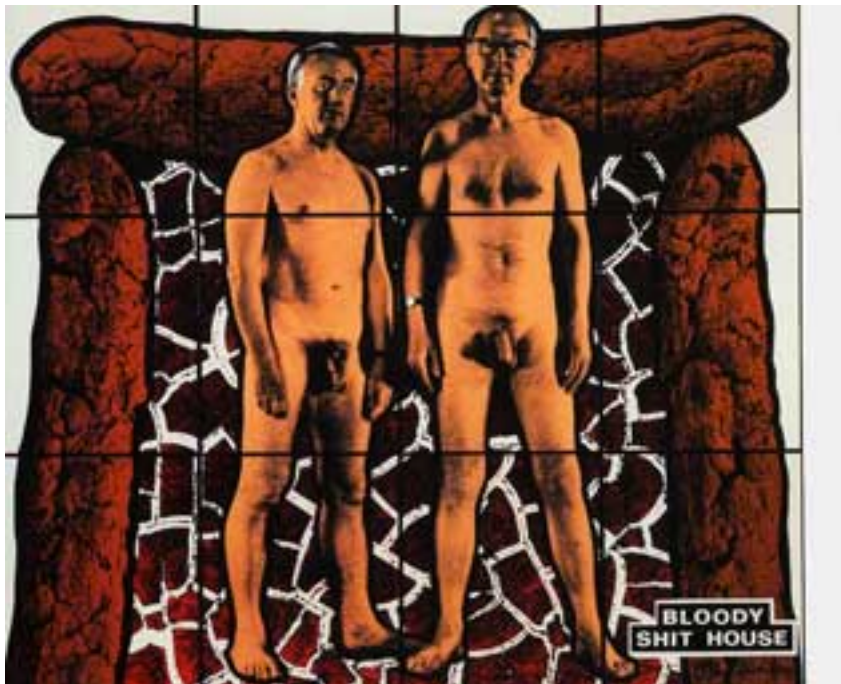


Figure 6.1
Gilbert and George
Bloody Shit House
1996

The image is a double self-portrait, produced in 1996 by the two artists known as Gilbert and George⁶⁶ (they sign their work, and are referred to by their joint forenames), and is one of a series of images under the collective title *The Fundamental Pictures*. It is a self-portrait (or potentially so) at a number of different levels: the central photograph is of the two artists, the 'doorway' is made up of faeces, and the 'interior' is blood, these latter two substances being arguably, among the most 'indexical'.

As an image in and of itself, it generates 'provocations' in relation to: the grid-like structure and symmetry of the image; the expression of male nudity and the representation of manipulated images of 'abject' corporeal matter.

The grid structure, and the placing of the objects within the grid create a sense of formal symmetry and order/orderliness. It also underlines the constructed/'designed' nature of the image – like an architectural drawing or

⁶⁶ Gilbert Proesch, born in Italy in 1943; George Passmore born in the UK in 1942.

blueprint. As will be discussed further below, in addition to serving as a formal device, the grid has also been interpreted as embodying and articulating the subjects' abject (non-normative) sexuality.

Superimposed over the substantive content of the image, the grid also evokes the framing of a window. The viewer is positioned almost as a voyeur looking on to the two male nudes who in turn are framed by (their own?) corporeal matter. In art historical terms, a distinction has been drawn in relation to the female body between the 'naked' and the 'nude' (Berger, 1972). Nakedness, for Berger, suggests the vulnerability of "being without disguise" and the promise of the "familiar" while 'nudity' implies an object "seen naked by others and not recognized for oneself" (Berger, 1972, p.54). As Berger and other commentators have noted, there are, however, different power relations at play in the production, representation and viewing of the male nude, including the implications of the male/female gaze (Kestner, 1995; Mulvey, 1981; Solomon-Godeau, 1997).⁶⁷ In the context of this self-portrait it does, however, raise the question whether this represents self-exposure on the part of the artists – revealing their vulnerability through their nakedness, or a mask suggestive of the nude – one which the artists deploy to actively avoid or deny being "recognized for oneself" (Berger, 1972, p.54). As Nancy suggests:

"Whatever the link between a naked body and the face, nudity involves stakes that are not, or not exclusively, those of the subject, not of the 'person' but of nudity itself...the portrait marks a break with nudity...since it exposes another sort of nudity altogether, that of the subject." (Nancy, 2006, p.223)

This sense of physical exposure, but under controlled conditions is given added weight by the physical relationship to the viewer and the denial of an exchange of looks. While the nakedness suggests (physical) vulnerability the full-length pose places the artists at a physical distance from the viewer. The potential intimacy of a shared gaze is also denied by the fact, as noted earlier,

⁶⁷ It is recognized that the implications of the representation of the male nude is an important area for further examination, but the current context does not allow for a more detailed consideration.

that one of the subjects looks into the middle distance to the right, and one looks upward, in a pose frequently used in (Christian) religious iconography.

The play between self-exposure and mask is also suggested by the prosaic nature of the watch and spectacles worn by the subjects. Again, in the context of representations of the female body, Berger suggests that an element of the “banal” – or “loss of mystery” – is key to representations of ‘nakedness’ (Berger, 1972, p.59). Here, the retention of these mundane items promises this familiarity, but also perhaps draws attention to the artificiality of the image, as well as perhaps suggesting play or humour, including self-parody. As will be discussed below it may also be part of the subjects’ ‘visual strategy’ of using “signifiers of middle-class stability” as a way of undermining convention (Dibosa, 2009; Jones, 1995).

The image contains not only the full-length (and naked) physical external presence of the artists, but also, in the background, representations of internal corporeality; the magnified images of blood and faeces which comprise the building blocks of the “bloody shit house”. The use of these ‘abject’ materials is underlined in the colour tones used in the image – the reddish-brown against a white background – and is signalled in the legend contained within the image and in the title of the series from which this image comes – *The Fundamental Pictures*. As Fisher (1984) notes, titles are more than just descriptive (though they can be this too), but are guides to interpretation. Certainly, the legend, contained within the body of the image itself, immediately points up the abject (assuming a basic understanding of demotic speech); evoking both the fact of blood and ‘shit’, but also the vernacular use of ‘shit house’ as slang for a mess, but also for a midden or waste dump, including for human excrement. The title of the series from which this image is drawn and the text on the back cover of the exhibition catalogue, plays on the word fundament – fundamental as in foundation, but also as fundament – buttocks or anus, and on fundamentalism as traditional orthodox beliefs. Thus, the text leaves the viewer in no doubt about the focus on the ‘abject’. But although blood and faeces are compositionally present, they are not specifically linked to the artists’ physical selves

(although Gilbert and George do argue that it is all their own work) – they are literally background. Further, because they are so magnified and worked over technically the abject materials produce their own aesthetic effects, in terms of colour, shape, form and placement in the grid system. As the artists' themselves comment:

"Even if they had some real shit and lavatory paper stuck to the pictures they would mean nothing...We think that through the form we use, through the negative that [sic] becomes so hard and polished, the pictures become so powerful and so aggressive in some funny way...people said that we even made shit beautiful." (in Obrist and Violette 1997, p.248)

As noted earlier, the 'abject' refers not just to materials but also to the socially excluded. In the case of the work of Gilbert and George the use of the grid and the representation of the scatological are seen as articulating and celebrating a non-normative sexuality (Bourguignon, 2000; Çakırlar, 2011). It is suggested, however, that this is a reading that begins to move beyond the picture plane to the constitution of the subjectivity of the portrayed through the interpretation of the image. The work of 'talk' in constituting the portrayed is the focus of the next section.

6.3.2 Gilbert and George: in their own and others' words

Figure 6.1 is characteristic of Gilbert and George's work which often comprises large scale coloured photographic montages or a 'bricolage' of objects or materials blown up in size, reduced in scale, or distorted in some way, placed within or on top of a grid structure, often in primary colours.

Written text features in much of their work – including photographic images of graffiti, particularly expletives, or 'found' text such as newspaper headlines, or as a legend or title inserted into the image.

In addition to the ubiquity of their 'portraits' (clothed and unclothed), the images include photographs of the people (predominantly young men) and physical environment of the East End of London, where the artists live.

Many of their images include photographic or cartoon representations of culturally abject material such as semen, blood, urine and faecal matter.

Further as intimated, the work of Gilbert and George has been interpreted as a challenge to, and critique of, normative male heterosexuality.

Figure 6.1, is therefore useful for exploring the play of recognition and abjection at two levels: as a portrait incorporating both abject materials and opening on to a performative and putatively abject subjectivity; and as an art object subject to evaluative criteria and absorption into (or rejection from) the institution as canon and physical space. Key to understanding the operation of these processes is the artists 'performance' of themselves as 'Gilbert and George', a lived, imaged and discursive 'fiction of the pose' (Berger, 1994) characterised by what could be called a transgressive conformity and a play on (non-normative) sexuality. In this process of self-creation, the words of Gilbert and George are as much the art as the photo-images themselves - a textual portrait - which becomes the prism through which they and their work comes to be interpreted. The following section briefly illustrates this process of subject formation drawing on examples from their published interviews and examples from the interpretive literature. The ways in which this feeds into or is fed by art critical commentary on the images is discussed below.

*Constructing Gilbert and George*⁶⁸

'Gilbert and George', as an artistic identity was formed in the late 1960s when the two men were both students at St Martin's School of Art in London. They describe the formation of this identity as a way of rejecting the "elitism" of the art associated with the school at that time, and in particular the sculpture department. From their earliest incarnation as a self-created 'living sculpture', they have actively fashioned an identity in which

⁶⁸ Much of this section draws on an edited collection of interviews with the artists *The Words of Gilbert and George* (Obrist and Violette, 1997). Although not examined critically here, where it is used primarily as a resource, it is nonetheless acknowledged that this too is arguably a contribution to the discourse constitutive of 'Gilbert and George', and as such potentially a 'topic' in its own right.

“we are both the art and the artist” (in Obrist and Violette, 1997, p.177). The performance ‘Gilbert and George’, is a mode of presentation and representation: it is in the way the artists present their physical selves both in media images and in their art works, and also in an on-going, self-constituting narrative in their text based works, films and interviews.

A signature of the performance, both in media images and in their art, is that (when presented dressed) each wears, like a pair of non identical twins, similarly styled formal men’s suiting. These are what the artists refer to as their “responsibility-suits of art”. Commentators have described this adoption of conventional male business suiting as articulating a pose of conventionality by which to ostensibly reject conformity and the “implicit ideology of youth fashions” (Bracewell, 2007; Dibosa, 2009).⁶⁹ As suggested earlier, in figure 6.1 the fact that the otherwise naked artists wear watches and spectacles perhaps continues this play on sartorial conventionality.

The nature of their relationship with each other, and their sexuality is also something with which they play. Although living together, ‘performing’ in public together, wearing identical suiting and producing art works that have leant themselves to homoerotic interpretations, they reject being seen as gay spokesmen and distance themselves from a homo-erotic reading of their work:

“We don’t want to make a homosexual or heterosexual art. We never wanted to do that. We want to make a sexual art. We think that’s very important.” (in Obrist and Violette 1997, p.288)

“There’s nothing homosexual about our pictures. All men have cocks...We are interested in sex. We don’t do eunuch art...We don’t want to decide what a person does with their hands or sexual organs. We are freedom fighters...More importantly we are normal.” (in Obrist and Violette, 1997, p.170)

⁶⁹ Commentators such as Jones (1995) have examined in more detail than is possible here the ways in which male artists have used the way they dress to reinforce or subvert normative masculine identity.

Yet they and their work have consistently been interpreted through the prism of their imputed sexuality. For Bourguignon (2000), for example, Gilbert and George's use, since the early 1970s, of the grid system to structure the internal spaces of their images (evident too in *Bloody Shit House*), and the "conformist" strategies of their external appearances, is a parallel of, and a challenge to, the repression of the 'closet' which protects, but also silences and represses homosexual identity and homosexual desire. Thus, for Bourguignon, the grid is read not as an aesthetic device *per se*, but as a visual strategy for expressing and challenging political repression, a strategy underpinned by the artists' physical presentation of self outwith the space of the picture plane. Bourguignon (2000), links this interpretation back to the specific identities of the two artists:

"If the grid/clothes represented societal repression of sexuality, especially of homosexuality, it also allowed the artists to explore and expose this sexuality because it granted them a certain protection or distance from their viewers. This too became part of their identity." (np)

The specifically faecal focus, or what one commentator refers to as Gilbert and George's "scatological aesthetics" (Çakırlar, 2011), emerges in their work as early as the late 1960s, and is a recurring motif. In 1994, for example, the artists produced the *Naked Shit Pictures*, a series of 19 pictures incorporating images of Gilbert and George dressed, semi-dressed/un-dressed and naked, together with images of faeces flying, in the form of poles, or in a cruciform shape, overlaid on background photographs of crowds, landscapes and cityscapes. This was followed, in 1996, by *The Fundamental Pictures* series from which the *Bloody Shit House* (figure 6.1) is taken.

When accounting for their use of faecal matter, as well as blood and other bodily fluids, as the subject and medium of their art, Gilbert and George themselves seem to draw on four different discourses. In an almost Kristevan move (though they appear not to use the term 'abject'), they allude to the constitutive necessity of the abject (and its expelling) for the physical body to continue to exist:

"We need to eat, we need to spit, we need to piss and we need to shit, so it's more important than anything else. Without these kinds of objects we wouldn't be able to survive to live..." (in Obrist and Violette 1997, p.301)

By the same token they draw on a normalising discourse. Shitting is a universal activity - something which all can recognise and connect with or be connected by. Further, because of this universal and constituting experience, there is a moral imperative to display shit, "the morality that we are allowed to eat but not allowed to look at our shit is morally wrong" (in Obrist and Violette, 1997, p.248). Because of this, despite risking degradation, or being "damaged" by the process of collecting and displaying these indexical materials, the artists feel driven to do so to, "show every viewer what we really are" (in Obrist and Violette, 1977, p.301).

But, for Gilbert and George, the "power" of this ostensibly transgressive move, comes from the formal qualities of presentation – from the "beauty" of the objects imaged and the form in which they are presented.

"Recently people said that we even made shit beautiful in some way, that we gave a way of looking at it." (in Obrist and Violette, 1997, p.248)

For commentators, however, the representation of abject materials is again interpreted backward through the (imputed) non-normative sexuality of the artists, and forward as an expression of a queer art aesthetic.

A common theme is to link the emergence of the representation of bodily fluids in Gilbert and George's work, and also the gradual disappearance of images of young men, back to the emergence of AIDS from around 1984 (Henderson, 2007; Livingstone, 2007; Morgan, 1997). Henderson (2007), for example, sees *The Fundamental Pictures* series as mirroring "the way in which bodily fluids ceased being personal and instead became part of a pool of potentially transmissible pathology" (np).

For a commentator like Çakırlar (2011) the combination in these works of magnified images of faeces and other bodily substances superimposed under

“vulnerable” naked male bodies has a more positive political function in both exposing and “pastiche” masculine anxieties of abjection. This “radical double exposure”, as evident in *The Fundamental Pictures*, of (flaccid) male nakedness and abject materials “refers to a performance of de-abjection...signifying an artistic performance of normalization through transgression” (Çakırlar, 2011, p.97), throwing the “shame-gaze” back to the spectator. Gilbert and George’s “performance of self-embarrassing, self-shaming masculinity” (p.92) for Çakırlar thus functions to desubliminate masculinity and male shame: converting shame into joy, or “ejaculatory bliss”.

What this rapid overview begins to suggest is that the subjectivity of ‘Gilbert and George’ is emergent from, on the one hand, the knowing ‘pose’ adopted by the producers of the images, and, on the other hand, from the subjectivity imputed to the artists in and through the critical commentaries on their work. As the analysis by Çakırlar (2011) illustrates, the application of evaluative criteria and absorption (or rejection) of the work as an art object within the canon, can hinge not only on the formal qualities or art historical resonances, but the (political) efficacy of the images in challenging normative notions of ‘beauty’, heterosexual identity and the bourgeois *homo clausus* (Elias 1994 [1939]).

6.3.3 Institutional consecration of the *Bloody Shit House*

The Fundamental Pictures series, from which *Bloody Shit House* is drawn, was first exhibited in New York at the Sonnabend and Lehmann-Maupin Galleries.⁷⁰ In addition to photographs of Gilbert and George naked in different poses this series of 39 photo images includes hugely magnified images of faeces and blood (as in figure 6.1), semen, urine and spit.

In addition to the physical space of the gallery, the series was distributed and circulated by and through a number of different media under the control of

⁷⁰ Notwithstanding the artists’ apparent refusal to insist on their works “privileged status as art” (Livingstone, 2007, p.13) – each series is created for the exhibition space in which it will be displayed.

the artists. These include the publication of an exhibition catalogue (in Gilbert and George's 'standard' format) reproducing all 39 images and a CD:Rom. The exhibition also coincided with the launch of a Gilbert and George website (no longer live).

The preparation of the photo-images was also documented for *The South Bank Show*, an arts programme on commercial television, which included interviews with the two artists. This film, 'The Fundamental Gilbert and George', was first shown in London at the Tate Gallery and at the National Film Theatre in February 1997 and subsequently aired on Channel 4.

In interviews Gilbert and George consistently attempt to distance themselves from other artists, from collectors and the art market: "we're anti art for posh people...we don't believe in an art world" (in Obrist and Violette, 1997, p.134). Despite this, and their ostensible rejection of the left wing avant-garde (Livingstone, 2007), by the time *The Fundamental Pictures* were exhibited the artists were, in some respects, entrenched within the avant-garde canon (if this is not a contradiction in terms). Grenfell and Hardy (2003), for example, include Gilbert and George among the 'established' artists in their analysis of the 'field' of contemporary British Art in the 1990s.

This 'canonisation' may go some way to account for the degree of ennui or jocular familiarity that might be noted in some of the contemporary media responses to the exhibition.⁷¹ The self-descriptive *Naked Shit Pictures*, shown in London the year before provoked the Mail on Sunday's headline 'The shock of the poo'⁷², while *The Fundamental Pictures*, generated 'Digitising doo doo for the internet' (Independent, 8 June 1997) and 'Arty Farty' (Sunday Mirror, 23 February, 1997).

⁷¹ This brief overview of contemporary media responses was based on a rapid search using the Lexis Library and Factiva databases, and as such will only reflect the responses of the newspapers covered by these databases. Further, no attempt has been made to undertake a systematic content analysis of these articles.

⁷² A play on *The Shock of the New*, the title of a documentary series and book on the development of modern art produced by the art critic Robert Hughes in 1980.

Although *Bloody Shit House* has been singled out here for particular attention, largely for pragmatic purposes (being downloadable, and hence reproducible in yet a further form), it is one of a series of pictures whose collective impact may be different from that of the individual image.⁷³ This is reflected in art critical responses which tend to comment on the whole series rather than individual images. One commentary that does make specific reference to *Bloody Shit House*, describes the work as among the more ‘trivial’ compared with other images in the series (Morgan, 1997).

Reading across the evaluative commentary it is possible to identify three different strategies critics appear to draw on to position (and ‘canonise’) this series of works. The first strategy seeks to locate the works within the existing art historical canon, Early Modern art in particular. This surfaces in relation to the not dissimilar *Naked Shit Pictures* series which, according to the art critic David Sylvester, “are as full of pictures of males nudes posturing, gesturing, parading...not reminiscent of stained glass but of Italian frescoes” (Sylvester, 1996, p.318).

The art historical legitimization of the abject: locating the images within an established lineage, both in terms of substance and form, is compounded by a second strategy, that of reading the works as articulating a humanist and/or quasi religious morality. This coalesces in Rosenblum’s introductory essay to the exhibition catalogue for *The Fundamental Pictures*:

“Brilliantly transforming the visible world into emblems of the spirit, Gilbert and George create from these macroscopic facts an unprecedented heraldry that, in a wild mutation of the Stations of the Cross, fuses body and soul, life and death. Once again they have crossed a new threshold, opening unfamiliar gates of eternity.” (Rosenblum, 1997, np)

Although critics do not ostensibly evaluate the series through the lens of portraiture, a third strategy that can be read into the evaluative commentary

⁷³ In retrospect this may suggest a methodological failure, but it also alludes to the potential ‘sociability’ of images: the impacts of multiples over and above individual images, as well as between the images and the format(s) in which the images are viewed and the different social position or positioning of the viewers. The single image reproduced and distributed as ‘multiple’ is, however, discussed in chapter 7 below.

is the very traditional move of suggesting that the self-portraits represent not just the physical presence of Gilbert and George, but also their psychological 'essence'. What is of particular interest here is how the evaluative criteria merge the works with the imputed subjectivity of the artists. As noted earlier, Gilbert and George are to a degree complicit in this merging, but it is also paradigmatic of the genre of portraiture, with its 'flip flop' between evaluations of the image and evaluations of the imaged. This was touched upon in chapter 5, where the artist, Francesca Woodman's death became the prism through which some commentators evaluated both the works, and the representation of the self in the works. As will be discussed below, this slipperiness takes on a particular significance in the portrait of Dresie and Casie by Ballen. In the case of the self-authored portraits by Gilbert and George, however, this evaluative merging of image and imaged has a number of manifestations. For example it can be seen in the allusion to "the reality of their corporeal selves" (Bracewell, 2007, p.35). Evaluative consideration is given not just to the formal properties of the abject materials represented in their art²⁴, but the imputed indexicality of these materials. Bracewell, for example, describes how Gilbert and George, have included "phenomena" from both the streets and from within their own bodies:

"...Locating scripts and symbols, maps and patterns, a density encoded within the massively magnified substances of their own blood, sweat, urine and tears." (Bracewell, 1997, p.27)

Self-revelation both through the exposure of their naked (external) selves and their (internal) bodily fluids is framed as expressing the artists' 'vulnerability'. Referring to one of *The Fundamental Pictures* (but not *Bloody Shit House*), Rosenblum (1997), for example, describes Gilbert and George as appearing "stark naked and traumatised as a new Adam and Eve". Not only do such references reinforce the legitimating function of allusions to Early Modern art described earlier, but continues the (Christian) religious theme

²⁴ The art critic David Sylvester, for example, reviewing the not dissimilar *Naked Shit Pictures* series, describes how "the faeces they present us with are perfectly formed units... Blown up they look like rocks...Employed as building materials for monuments human excrement becomes as sociable as cow dung" (Sylvester, 1996, p.317).

that threads its way through much of the (positive) critical commentary on Gilbert and George's work.

It is interesting that the consideration of the artists' sexuality, which fed into much of the commentary from the 1980s onwards, is much more muted in relation to *The Fundamental Pictures*. In place of the ostensible homoeroticism of their early 1980s work, the images are read as representations of the aging artists' physical and psychological vulnerability. In other words, it is the vulnerability of their nakedness, rather than the sexual provocation of the nude that is foregrounded.

6.3.4 Absorbing 'Gilbert and George'

Through an overview of the 'Words of Gilbert and George' (Obrist and Violette, 1997) and an interpretation of the critical commentary on the art objects they produce it becomes possible to see the operation of a number of different processes of absorption and reconstitution of boundaries. First, the analysis of the artists' own accounts and the interpretive and evaluative commentaries on their works suggest that the subjectivity of 'Gilbert and George' is emergent from the mutually reinforcing action of, on the one hand, the knowing 'pose' adopted in and by the producers of the images - the visual and textual pictures that the artists draw through not just their photographic self-portraits, but the interviews and accounts of their work. On the other hand, 'Gilbert and George' emerges from the subjectivity imputed to the artists in and through critical commentaries on the work; including the 'flip flop' between the evaluation of the image and an evaluation of the subject(s) of the image. In effect, although the performative and performance that is 'Gilbert and George' could be seen as challenging what Jones (1994) refers to as the unitary (bourgeois) authorial subjectivity, the combination of their own 'voice' and the readings of their work, reinstanciate this very authorial subjectivity – and in the process construct and re-construct the subjectivity (ies) of Gilbert and George.

Second, what is also revealed is what Morgan (1997) describes as the 'aestheticization of the abject'. That is, the way in which even the most

normatively abject material, the matter most out of place on the white walls of the gallery, cannot only be absorbed into the 'clean and proper', but can actually acquire value. It is an almost alchemical process of "creating value out of fairly brutish material" (interview with Gilbert and George by Adrian Searle and Dan Atkinson, *The Guardian* 24 January 1997) – a value that appears to be acquired through the mutually reinforcing action of the evaluative criteria applied and the associated commercial value of the works.⁷⁵ Through the attention to form, to the art historical canon and a humanist discourse, the threat of the abject, like the chaos or 'shock' and power of the 'sublime' is effectively, 'tamed' or domesticated' (to paraphrase Battersby, 2007). Like the 'picturesque' it serves to:

"...Reassure that - even where there is disorder - man is in control and that nature has been constructed for human delight." (Battersby, 2007, p.12)

In effect, what a focus on the images and the 'talk' about the images reveals is that in the complex 'dance' of pose, performance, imputation and evaluation, the 'abject' ceases to be transgressive or threatening but becomes normalised and neutralised. Far from defiling the white cube of the gallery spaces, the representation of faeces and blood are effectively absorbed by the gallery walls. Rather than constituting matter out of place (Douglas, 2007 [1966]), the boundaries of 'out of place-ness' prove permeable. In fact, not only are these abject materials absorbed they undergo an increase in evaluative and financial value (Thompson, 1979). Further, while Gilbert and George's knowing presentation and representation can be interpreted as a critique of normative heterosexual masculinity, this too can turn back on itself. As Jones (1994) argues in her analysis of the work of male body of performance artists of the 1960s and 1970s, while their work could be read as a challenge to the "heterosexual, masculine conception of artistic authority" it can work "both against and with the grain of phallic authority" (p. 553):

⁷⁵ Several contemporary newspaper articles refer to the monetary value of the images. Robert Askwith, for example, writing in the *Mail on Sunday* notes that, "A good Gilbert and George can fetch GBP 200,000" (4 April 1999). Another article describes the brand recognisability of Gilbert and George's work, which, according the journalist, "can sell for between \$40,000 and \$200,000 (£25,000 - £125,000), depending on the scale of the piece" (Ian Burrell, *Independent on Sunday*, 8 November 1999, p. 49).

"Subversive, or simply regressive and phallogentric each of these pieces both strategically unhinges the phallus/penis/artist equation, and in some ways reinforces it." (p.578)

To explore this aesthetic-political double-cross, a second image will be analysed: a black and white photograph by the American photographer Roger Ballen of the twins Dresie and Casie (figure 6.2). A double portrait of two men (as in *Bloody Shit House*) but one in which the authoring and authorising of the subjectivities is more problematically dispersed between the image, imaged and image-maker (and viewer), and in which the putatively 'celebratory' revelation of the abject (Çakırlar, 2011) is potentially more troubling.

6.4 Roger Ballen: Dresie and Casie, Twins, Western Transvaal, 1993

6.4.1 Dresie and Casie, Twins, Western Transvaal, 1993



Figure 6.2
Roger Ballen
Dresie and Casie, Twins, Western Transvaal,
1993
Silver Gelatin print

This second image (figure 6.2) comprises a black and white photograph of two young white men - twins. The twin on the right (facing the viewer) is wearing an open-necked, short-sleeved shirt, which appears stained down the front. The shirt has two pleated pockets in which he may be keeping things (they appear to be bulging). He is standing upright with his arms down his sides. He looks slightly unshaven. His clean-shaven brother also wears a white open-necked, short-sleeved shirt with one patch pocket. The shirt looks stained under the right collar, but less so than that of his brother's, and is half tucked into the waistband of his light-coloured trousers. Leaning slightly to the (viewer's) right, he has crossed his arms in front of him and on

his left wrist he wears a watch. They both have dark, short hair, with fringes cut high on their foreheads. The left hand twin's hair has been flattened down, that of his brother stands up. Their short hair exposes what appear to be quite pronounced ears. Saliva is dripping from the mouths of both men; from the centre of the lip of the twin on the left and from the left corner of that of his brother's. They stand close together, directly facing and at eye-level to the viewer/camera. The creases on their foreheads suggest frowns, accusatory or quizzical expressions. They stand against a shadow-less white wall or background. Light appears to be coming in from the right, and exposing one-half of the twins' faces and casting the other side in a slight shadow. A sense of compressed space is underlined by the close cropping of the picture: at the waist level of the two men, at the sides (the outer arms of both men are either not visible or cut off), and at the top (just clearing the right-hand twin's head).

This double portrait, *Dresie and Casie, Twins, Western Transvaal, 1993* was among the images included by the photographer Roger Ballen (1995) in his monograph *Platteland: Images from Rural South Africa*. At one level this image is closer to conventional portraiture than figure 6.1. Dresie and Casie are photographed close up, clothed and ostensibly the subject of the image. But aspects of the medium, the internal form and the content systematically undercut this (relatively) unproblematic reading.

In terms of medium, the use of black and white film coupled with the way the photographer has used the light makes the image appear quite stark, sharpening the contrasts and emphasising the men's physical features.⁷⁶ But, interpretively, this continued use of an older photographic medium, rather than colour film, combined with its content locates it within a lineage of

⁷⁶ The significance of the technology and the medium is highlighted in a commentary on Ballen's work that describes how, in the 1980s, Ballen changed from using a 35mm Nikon camera, to using a Rolleiflex. The reason Ballen gives is that the rectangular image produced with the Nikon implied that with each shot one length was more important than the other, whereas the 2¼ inch square format of the Rolleiflex "encourages a neutral aesthetic, emphasizing the formal shapes with the image and their contrasting textures" (Young, 2012 <http://www.rogerballen.com/articles/the-photography-of-roger-ballen> - webpage no longer live).

images in the unstable border between documentary and 'art'. Commentators variously suggest that, historically, Ballen's images evoke the work of August Sander (1876-1964), who in his project 'People of the 20th Century' aimed to capture the portraits of a cross-section of early 20th Century German Society (Benjamin, 2009 [1931]; Sontag, 1984 [1977]) (see, for example, figure 6.3). It also recalls photographs commissioned by the American Farm Security Administration (FSA) in the 1930s. Although intended, according to Sontag to be avowedly "propagandist" and to demonstrate to middle class people "that the poor were really poor, and that the poor were dignified" 1984 [1977] p.62), some of these images have also crossed the documentary-art divide and taken on their own 'iconic' [aesthetic] status, independent of their initial context (see, for example, figure 6.4).



Figure 6.3
August Sander
Young Farmers
1914

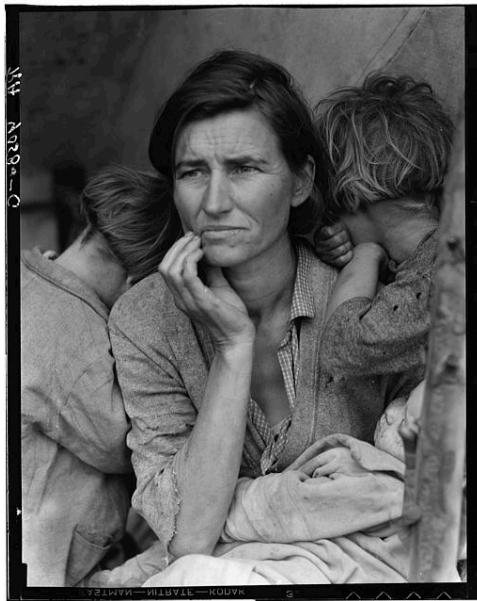


Figure 6.4
Dorothea Lange
'Migrant Mother' (Destitute Pea Pickers in California, mother of seven children, Age thirty-two, Nipomo, California)
1936

Although only signalled by the full title of the portrait of Dresie and Casie, the South African dimension opens on to comparisons with the work of David Goldblatt (1930-), who used black and white photography to document life under apartheid (Young, 2012).

The medium used coupled with the internal dynamic of Ballen's image - the confined space, the closeness of the two men to the viewer and the directness of their gaze to camera - also, however, evokes the late 19th century 'mugshots' of asylum inmates and prisoners (Edwards, 1990; Gilman, 1982; Gilman, 1995) and in this cognitive leap, to the 19th Century eugenics movement.

Through what could be argued to be a shared conceptual route, Ballen's image draws parallels with the work of Diane Arbus who, working in the 1950s and 1960s, self-avowedly photographed people who 'looked strange' (Sontag, 1984 [1977]).⁷⁷

⁷⁷ A text accompanying Ballen's image submitted for a Citigroup prize in 2002, illustrates the response the image provoked in the media - *"It looked like one of Diane Arbus's many identical*

The medium used, and the internal formal arrangement, thus trigger references to the poor, the mad, the bad, the excluded, but potentially threatening Other. This abjection by formal association is underwritten by the content.

At an immediate level the image of the two men with shared and very distinctive physical features, in such close proximity to each other (and to the viewer), evokes what Freud, (2003 [1919]) describes as the *uncanniness* of the double (or Doppelgänger). For Freud, the uncanny is a sense of the familiar rendered strange (or 'unhomely' (*unheimlich*)); in psychoanalytic terms it is a return of the repressed.⁸ Although not intending here to read this image through a psychoanalytic prism, Freud's analysis draws attention to the way in which the double is constituted and experienced as troubling or unsettling, its symmetrical orderliness provoking its own converse - a sense of disorder or out of place-ness. Gilbert and George draw on the double's potential to unsettle in the way that, in many of their images, they mirror each other's pose, in their adoption of identical or matching modes of dress, or, as in *Bloody Shit House*, their shared nakedness, but it is playing with the form. Arguably, because Gilbert and George are so self-evidently *not* twins the visual/emotional charge of the doppelgänger, whether psychoanalytically generated or tapping into some form of social imaginary, is largely missing from their work. In the case of the image of Dresie and Casie the doubling of their distinctive physical and facial features works to provoke a sense of a self "duplicated, divided and interchanged" (Freud, 2003 [1919], p.142), and as such, becomes disruptive of the familiar.

twins, taken in the 1960's and 1970's only without the obvious empathy" <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2002/feb/02/weekend> (accessed 4 March 2012). It is possibly ironic – Arbus is not necessarily known for her empathy. It should also be noted that Arbus was working in the 1950's and 1960's, she died in 1971.

⁸ Drawing on the stories of E.T.A. Hoffman, Freud analysis the uncanny effect produced by the double – "persons who have to be regarded as identical because they look alike" (Freud (2003 [1919], p.141). Freud sees the sense of uncanniness experienced when faced with a doppelgänger as having its basis in the evolution of the ego during which the meaning of the 'double' changes. In the ego's earlier 'primitive stage', the double is experienced as "an assurance of mortality". In the subsequent development of the ego the 'double' is experienced as something alien and to be ejected - it is the "uncanny harbinger of death" and an "object of terror".

Unlike the image of Gilbert and George, Dresie and Casie are clothed. This in itself is unremarkable, and again much closer to the 'traditional' posed portrait. The fact too, that the clothing of the right hand twin is noticeably dirtier than that of his brother does not necessarily wholly subvert the genre if the fiction being posed (Berger, 1994) is that of a romanticised and sanitised representation of the 'dignity of labour' or 'dignity of the poor'. Ballen, talking in a podcast about how this picture was taken, does in fact describe how the twin with the dirty shirt had been working out of doors while the one with the cleaner shirt had come from indoors.⁷⁹

Problematically, in the absence of this explanation (or other indicators of the nature of the man's work) the only visible link is between the saliva from his lip and the marks on his shirt. In a converse move to that described above in relation to *Bloody Shit House*, this potentially pitches the image from the neutralising effect of the 'picturesque', to the more threatening realm of the abject, or, in Battersby's terms with the 'sublime' "an encounter which is so strange or strikingly 'other' that our conceptual framework is unable to encompass it" (2007, p.11). Arguably, the sense of 'shock' on encountering the 'other' in this image arises because, unlike the faeces and blood included in *Bloody Shit House*, the overflowing saliva is very directly linked to the two men. The representation of this bodily effusion is not (apparently) the outcome of a series of active technical processes (including photographic magnification) intended for insertion into the background or foreground of the image, with only an implied rather than demonstrable link to the artists, but is apparently issuing from Dresie's and Casie's own lips at the moment the photograph was being taken. Further, the 'civilizing process' has deemed saliva as inappropriate for public display and its exposure indicative of a shaming lack of bodily continence in adults. As such any inadvertent leakage should be a source of humiliation and embarrassment - for which an apology would be offered or sought (Elias, 1994 [1939]; Koestenbaum, 2011; Munt, 2008; Tavuchis, 1991). But in this image the two men appear

⁷⁹ <https://www.eastmanhouse.org/events/detail.php?title=roger-ballen> (accessed 15 June 2015).

unabashed in presenting themselves to view with saliva ostensibly dripping from their lips.

Also pulling the photograph in a number of directions is the watch worn by the brother on the left. As with the image of Gilbert and George, the watch is both a banal residue of a life lived beyond the space and time of the photograph, but also in its very 'normality' draws attention to the 'strangeness' of the image. In the case of Gilbert and George it was suggested that the spectacles and glasses they wore on their otherwise naked bodies served to point up both the artificiality of the image, and their own parodic, transgressive respectability. In the case of Dresie and Casie, the watch may perform a similar double action: on the one hand acting as a "signifier of middle class stability" (Jones, 1995, p.27); and, on the other, against the counter signifiers in the image of physical labour and non-normative corporeality, to (unwittingly) parody that respectability.

Adding to the image's ambiguity is the direct 'full frontal' pose of the two men. In *Bloody Shit House* Gilbert and George present themselves similarly full or near frontal, but full length and at a distance so that there is less sense of physical proximity to the viewer or the implied intimacy of looking or being seen. Dresie and Casie, on the contrary are presented half-length, close up, and looking very directly at the photographer/viewer. From an art-historical perspective, the frontal position in figure painting can work to position the viewer; generating an implied 'conversation' between the person being painted, and the observer (painter/photographer and/or viewer) (Berger, 2001a; Marin, 1980; Schapiro, 1973). Schapiro, for example, describes how, "we are inclined to see whatever faces us as looking at us" (1973, p.39).

This sense of Dresie and Casie existing "in a space virtually continuous with our own" (Schapiro, 1973, p.39) coupled with the directness of the gaze – the absence of shame's downcast eye (Charles Darwin, in Munt, 2008) has the potential to work at three levels. First, it perhaps reinforces the sense of the uncanny, discussed earlier, of being in the presence of something that is both

familiar and yet somehow 'out of place'. Second, to be in "a space continuous with our own", suggests an exchange and an equality of gazes – to be looked at and look back. As described by one commentator:

"Ballen presents us with two sharp massively physical beings scrutinising the camera's lens back with as much intensity as we, as viewers bring to the photograph. Such is its power that we do not feel comfortable sitting back and judging these subjects; we are also forced to consider how they view us."
(Cook, c2008, p.18)

Third, and following on from this, it can be read as a rejection or refusal of what Munt (2008) has called "the injurious abjection caused by the withdrawal of the gaze of social acceptance" (p.222). Their unabashed look could be read as a challenge to the other signifiers within and on which the image draws for some of its 'meaning', to provoke a more politicised reading which sees their presentation and representation as a challenge to the "hegemonic ideals" (Munt, 2008) of the bourgeois *homo clausus* (Elias, 1994 [1939]). This duality (duplicity?) of the image affords a reading of the photograph both as a critique, challenging and pushing the boundaries of bourgeois aesthetics and standards of beauty (in art and in physical form) and of normative subjectivity, and as an image which perpetuates or reinforces these "hegemonic ideals", constitutive of the abjection of the subjects of the image.

6.4.2 Dresie and Casie: Beyond the picture plane

'Dresie and Casie' in context

As suggested in relation to *Bloody Shit House*, individual images produced in monographs, or as part of larger exhibitions, have their own 'sociability'. The interpretations or meanings attached to the whole may be different from the affordances offered up by individual images when seen out of their presentational context. However, although, like *Bloody Shit House*, the image of Dresie and Casie has been bracketed together in a compound interpretation of the body of work of which it is a part, unlike the image by Gilbert and George it has also had a life of its own split off from its original context.

The whole, of which the image of Dresie and Casie is one part, is a series of around 20 black and white photographs first reproduced in the monograph published as *Platteland: Images from Rural South Africa*^{80,81} (Ballen 1995). The images are of predominantly white couples or individuals ‘posing’ sitting or standing in their homes or gardens looking directly at the camera. The apparent sparseness of the physical environments in which the men and women are photographed is suggestive of the poverty of the inhabitants of these rural towns. The title of the series and the publication date locates these images within a specific geographic and political ‘space’: the period in which the political regime of apartheid was being formally dismantled in South Africa.⁸²

An analysis of the responses to this series of images, contemporaneous and over time reveals a constant allusion to the sense of the ‘other-ness’ of the people as imaged:

“His [Ballen’s] camera has recorded the troubled minds of these people, who gaze defencelessly into the camera and who have no sense of their visual presence. They are outsiders, excluded people, whose physiognomies are etched with the marks of their profound alienation from what is considered normal human existence.” (Pohlmann, 2010, p.8)

But, in accounting for this otherness, the duplicitous nature of the photographic image - its allusive reality and hidden construction - is played out in the commentaries. Reading across the responses, the images are seen as documents opening on to the macrocosmic politics of apartheid and its dismantling and/or as raising problematic questions about the microcosmic political and ethical relation between photographed, photographer and viewer (when photographer and photographed are not one and the same).

⁸⁰ Platteland – literally ‘flat land’ in Afrikaans, refers to the rural areas of South Africa (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/platteland> (accessed 10 July 2015)).

⁸¹ In the UK the images were also exhibited at the Royal Festival Hall Galleries on the South Bank in London in 1995.

⁸² The policy of apartheid (separateness) was adopted when the white National Party came to power in South Africa in 1948. Over the period 1989 – 1991 the laws were repealed. In 1994 the African National Council, led by Nelson Mandela won the first non-racial elections.

Whether focused at the macro or micro political, however, the perceived 'transgression' relates to the content and context of the images, not to the form.

When the monograph was published in South Africa, accompanied by two promotional exhibitions in Cape Town and Johannesburg, the photographer experienced the vilification and opprobrium of the South African media and arts community, arrest and death threats. Ballen, who denies being a 'political photographer', has described how unprepared he was for the level of "social anger" and "overwhelming disapproval" that the monograph generated (Coslovich, 2009). His introductory text to *Platteland*, however, firmly locates these images within the specifics of the political regime, seeing these people as victims of an ideology of white supremacy that was intended to secure their interests:

"Fundamentally, what drew me to this subject was the profound irony that, despite half a century of political privilege, here in the physical heart of South Africa, even in a system created to secure their survival, were archetypes of alienation and immobility, victims of both political forces and personal circumstances, defending themselves against economic deprivation and psychological anguish in a hostile and unyielding environment." (Ballen, 1995, c p.1)

Both Ballen, and commentators on this work, interpret the "tidal wave of controversy" (Cook, c2008) that the images provoked as due to the fact that, by documenting photographs of poor whites in conditions of deprivation, they transgressed the ruling white group's view of itself. According to Cook (c2008), Ballen's:

"Surreal vision and unsentimental regard was to upset the balance of the culture for whom certainties of black and white, coloniser and colonised were set in stone as a force of massive cultural defensiveness." (p. 20)

Ballen was seen as an interloping American "overstepping the mark of what could and could not be represented" (Cook, c2008, p.20).

In a context in which photography could be a technology of subjugation and surveillance, for example, through the pass books ('dompas') containing identity photographs, which black South Africans were required to carry when travelling outside their homeland or designated areas, the images in *Platteland* could be evaluatively framed as transgressive insofar as they turned the colonial gaze on itself, revealing not the superiority of the whites, but their abjection – their own 'otherness' to themselves.

The evaluation of the images as politically transgressive seems to have shaped the response within the cultural field outwith South Africa. When *Platteland* was published the book jacket included an endorsement by Susan Sontag who is quoted as describing the monograph as "The most important sequence of portraits I've seen in years".⁸³ When the photographs were exhibited in London in 1995 a review in the free newspaper *Metro* described the images as:

"...A new slant, pure documentary...an incisive use of portraiture to reflect times of great change...And it is clear from the fraught and often ravaged faces that stare out from these powerful, virtually surreal portraits, that despite the political privilege apartheid has bestowed on the white population, many whites have slipped through the net. This is their story..." (*Metro*, 31 March 1995, p.2)

As with Gilbert and George, cultural institutional canonisation (outwith South Africa) came in the form of a special edition of the South Bank Show in February 1995, in which Ballen was filmed on a trip around the Western Transvaal. A television reviewer describes the film as revealing some of the "most demoralised people I had ever seen", and Ballen's photographs as "evocative, tragic, unforgettable portraits from hell" (Naughton, 1995, p. 25).

Responses to the series over time suggest the absorption and neutralising of the images as their meanings (and financial value) shift. As Ballen himself notes in recent interviews, the initial political furore that accompanied the publication of the images has dissipated and the series is now viewed in a

⁸³ <http://www.lensculture.com/ballen-video.html> (webpage no longer live).

nostalgic light “If I had done the same book now, nobody would care. So much in life is timing” (Ballen, quoted by Coslovich, 2009, np). The specificity of the context in which the images in the series were produced and published, gives way, in Ballen’s mind at least, to the supra-context of the ‘human condition’:

“So I think that the photographs which have become iconic in some ways are more related to the human condition than to the particular circumstances of the time.” (Ballen, quoted in an interview with Chas Bowie, 2007, np)

‘Dresie and Casie’ on their own

Evaluative commentary which views the images contained in the *Platteland* series as articulating a critique of the political regime of apartheid, runs in parallel to a strain of commentary which focuses on the ‘micropolitics’ of the relationship between the photographer and the photographed. At this micropolitical level critique is divided between an interpretation of the photographs as empowering and unsentimental and as an exploitative and unsympathetic ‘freak show’.

In relation to the image of Dresie and Casie it is this micropolitics of the power relations at the level of picture production, and the abjectness of these two men, rather than the macro politics of place that is given greater emphasis. This may have arisen because this photograph in particular has taken on a life of its own, separate from the other images in the series, compounded by the absence of markers of place, space or time, *within the image itself*.⁸⁴

It has been described as one of Ballen’s “most controversial and iconic images” (Cook, c2008, p.18), a cause and effect perhaps, of its ubiquity. In addition to the *Platteland* series, Ballen included the image of Dresie and Casie as part of his *Outland* series published in 2001. The photograph is also

⁸⁴ The absence of markers of place and space is perhaps indirectly illustrated by the experience of undertaking an internet search for the image of Dresie and Casie. As noted in chapter 4, this was initially impeded because I had assumed that, because of its formal properties (and subject matter), the photograph was the work of Arbus. Only by searching for ‘twins’ in Google Images did Ballen emerge as the photographer.

often used in advertisements for retrospectives of Ballen's work (e.g. *Shadow Land*, Manchester Art Gallery in 2012) and to illustrate as well as be the focus for published interviews with Ballen (see for example, Coslovich, 2009). Media and academic commentaries on his work as a whole also use this image both for illustration and critique (O'Hagan, 2012; Schoeman, 2011). Prints of the image have been auctioned, and in 2002 it was nominated for the Citigroup prize.⁸⁵ Ballen himself describes how it has also been used to sell products as diverse as hamburgers and property.⁸⁶

Dresie and Casie: Not in their own words

In interviews or podcasts accompanying retrospectives held in Manchester, New York and Western Australia in the 2000s, Ballen uses two strategies for positioning his body of work. First, a denial of its documentary quality, seeing it rather as "primarily existential and psychological" (interview with Coslovich, 2009, np). Drawing on the same humanist discourse identified in the commentaries on the work of Gilbert and George, Ballen describes his own work as opening onto or raising questions about the "human condition". He considers his work 'art' insofar as it helps to "expand consciousness" and "self-understanding", providing an opening on to the "deep interior of the self", defining a "condition before language".⁸⁷ Second, Ballen acknowledges the 'constructed' nature of his images, in the sense of selecting what he chooses to photograph "so not just happening and I was around to take the picture".⁸⁸ But he rejects the notion that they are 'staged' feeling that this implies that they are contrived or inauthentic. For Ballen, the fact that his images can have many meanings gives them authenticity.

⁸⁵ The absorption of Ballen's images into the mainstream is illustrated by a report in the Daily Telegraph in February 2002, which suggests the mutually reinforcing effect of being selected for a photography prize and the monetary value of art objects: "The annual Citigroup Private Bank photography prize... has a habit of spotting future art celebrities... This year, American photographer Roger Ballen is the name on everyone's lips. Since his discovery by London dealer Michael Hoppen three years ago, prices for Ballen's powerful portraits of poor South African whites have risen from pounds 600 each to pounds 15,000 for sought-after images." (Gleadell, Daily Telegraph, 4 February 2002, p.16).

⁸⁶ <https://www.eastmanhouse.org/events/detail.php?title=roger-ballen> (accessed 15 June 2015)

⁸⁷ Podcast to accompany Manchester Art Gallery retrospective, 2012, <http://www.manchestergalleries.org/whatson/exhibitions/index.php?itemID=87> (webpage no longer live)

⁸⁸ Ibid

Accounting for the image of Dresie and Casie, Ballen has described how it came about when he was travelling in relation to his geological work:

"As they were driving around the town Ballen glimpsed an interesting person in a garden. He stopped the car and walked over. The man could not speak but his mother was on the porch and Ballen asked if he could take a photo. She said yes. As he was shooting, he saw a shadow behind him, turned around, and was startled to find the other brother. He then asked if he could take a photo of both of them. The whole event lasted only five to eight minutes in total." (Cook, c2008, p.30)

As this quote suggests, there is an element of contingency in the process of capturing Dresie and Casie: Ballen sees "an interesting person" by chance who is then joined by his brother. Ballen does not account for what "interested" him, whether the picture published was one of a series of the brothers from which a selection was made, or why he included it in the monograph. The production process is therefore unseen. Ballen is, however, aware of the effect the image has had. In a podcast produced at the time of a retrospective of his work in New York in 2010, Ballen describes this image as being his most famous (but not necessarily "favourite") photograph, and one that would "haunt him to the grave". Aware that wherever he goes this is the one image of his to which people refer Ballen admits to struggling to understand what makes this image so unforgettable, conjecturing that it was "like looking at the other side of the brain, reflecting something very human, something that everyone has experienced though not necessarily in this generation...".⁸⁹ In an earlier interview, Ballen again seeks to account for the image's apparent visual power in terms suggesting that it taps into some pre-historic trace memory "What do you think human beings looked like a million years ago". At the same time the photographer seeks to distance himself from the implication that the two men represent some sort of 'throwback' to an earlier period of human development, by emphasising the constructed nature of the image and the multivalency of its meanings:

"The most important thing is I can't tell you the meaning of the picture; you have to find it yourself... You are not looking at them, you are looking at the

⁸⁹ <https://www.eastmanhouse.org/events/detail.php?title=roger-ballen> (accessed 15 June 2015)

picture. What you are looking at is a picture that I have created and refined and created an aesthetic with. The story is actually irrelevant because it may be subjective, it may be distorted.” (Ballen interviewed by Coslovich, 2009, np)

Dresie and Casie: Subject or object?

The analysis of the work of Gilbert and George suggests the parity of the artists’ voice in their self-construction and in mediating the evaluation of the art objects they produce. In this sense they are authors and authorisers of their own ‘abjection’. Dresie and Casie, by comparison with the similarly familiarly named ‘Gilbert and George’, have no public voice; as the subjects of the image they are silent (the description above of how the picture was taken also suggests that at least one of the twins was literally mute). Further, little is made known about their identities; which one is Dresie and which Casie (if that is their names), what their surname is⁹⁰, their age, or other aspects of their biography. This absence is filled by the authorial subjectivity of the photographer Ballen⁹¹, and by commentaries in which Dresie’s and Casie’s physicality, implicit assumptions about their mental and physical disabilities, or “genetic make up” (see for example, Coslovich, 2009; O’Hagan, 2012; O’Toole, 2012), and the degree to which they were complicit in the production of this ‘fiction of the self’ overwhelms evaluative commentary. It is the ‘aesthetic significance of the face’ (Simmel, 1959 [1901]) rather than the image qua image which takes precedence:

“The twins have misshapen faces, necks as thick as bullocks, ears that protrude like chimps’, bluntly cut spikey hair and prominent lower lips. Ballen has photographed them with a long thread of drool hanging from their blubbery mouths, their shirts wet and stained with dribble.

⁹⁰ A Google search suggests their surname may be Williams, but this is not verifiable – neither the publication in which the image first appears, nor Ballen’s subsequent references to the image give their full names.

⁹¹ Ballen himself was born in New York in 1950. His mother was a photographer’s assistant with the Magnum photographic agency and subsequently ran a photographic gallery. Initially Ballen studied psychology. Subsequently he took up geology, moving to South Africa in the early 1980s. He began photographing while young, buying his first camera at 13 years, but he had no formal photographic training. He published his first book, *Boyhood*, in 1979. His first collection of images of rural South Africa, *Dorps: Small Towns of South Africa*, was published in 1986. Ballen has his own website. At the time of writing (June 2015) this was still live (<http://www.rogerballen.com/>).

The image provokes an uncomfortable rush of thoughts and emotions: curiosity about the twins' genetic make up, intrigue about their story, concern that someone could so brutally point the camera and shoot – did the twins understand the ramifications of that moment?" (Coslovich, 2009, np)

As noted above, the commentaries on the *Platteland* images allude to the perceived 'otherness' of the people represented. In critiques and commentaries on the photograph of Dresie and Casie this seems to be coupled with a shared discomfort in looking, a discomfort not so evident in commentaries on the self-authored work of Gilbert and George. In accounting for their discomfort, commentators fall somewhere on a continuum between those who would criticize the photographer for his putative exploitation of the two men (an exploitation in which the viewer is made complicit) and those (including Ballen) who would criticize the viewer/observer for their oppressive and abjecting gaze. The ambiguous positioning of the viewer viz-a-viz Dresie and Casie is reflected in the commentators' uncertainty whether the image objectifies: rendering the twins mute and unknowing or uncomprehending objects of the viewer's curiosity; or is a 'performance' giving visibility to knowing, "inquisitive" individuals who are otherwise:

"Absent from representations of the human according to conventional protocols...refused the human possibility of being the ordinary subjects of photography." (Young, 2012, np).

Cook (c2008), for example, reiterates Ballen's expressed view that people have difficulty with his material because they cling to a notion of civilization and humanity that is fundamentally restricted and artificial, and which places culture above nature. Perhaps attempting to illustrate how Ballen's work extends the boundaries of the normative, in his own commentary on the image Cook both draws attention to their (non-normative) corporeality while also arguing that, rather than objectifying and constructing them as other, the image of Dresie and Casie, reflects the subject's capacity to 'return the gaze':

"[the image] Shows the twins with their hair sitting spiky on their heads, big noses, big ears, protruding bottom lips, and a stream of drool hanging from their mouths that has stained their shirts. They seem relaxed in their skins, totally alert to what is going on. This work is a study in inquisitiveness, a study in what it means to present a camera to another human and what it means to face that camera." (Cook, c2008, p.18)

Others are more critical – and it is notable that these are commentaries on, rather than texts accompanying exhibitions. O'Hagan (2012), for example, writing in the Guardian newspaper, critiques a seminar given by Ballen around the time a retrospective of the photographer's work was being shown in Manchester. In a largely critical article, ending with the comment that much of Ballen's work "leaves me cold", O'Hagan questions why Ballen does not address whether and why he was drawn, like Diane Arbus, "to the human grotesque", nor acknowledge "our complicity as viewers – the very thing that gives these images another layer of disturbing power" (O'Hagan, 2012).

Dresie and Casie in the world

Outwith the hermetic world of the academic journal and art criticism and into the (relatively) untrammelled work of the internet and blogging the photograph of Dresie and Casie, has taken on the life of a found image, with a similar afterlife (Schoeman, 2011). The focus in this media on the two men rather than the image per se, however, poses critical questions not just about 'authorial subjectivity' (whose?), 'fictions of the pose' (whose fiction and whose pose?) and transgression (pushing or reinforcing the boundaries) but about the ownership and control of the presentation of the self in the age of electronic reproduction:

"Probably the most famous and widely stolen photo on the internet!...I've seen this pic before and each time they (the twins) still manage to scare the snot right out of me!"

(http://www.modelmayhem.com/po.php?thread_id=754233

accessed 11 February 2013)

"The blogger [PrecordialThump](#) "it isn't enough that the twin brothers Dresie and Casie possess wildly protruding ears and tree trunk like necks but Ballen photographs them with gossamer like drool dripping from their thick pouting

lips....a future geneticist, seems to have found the correct answer - Fragile X syndrome."
(<http://casesblog.blogspot.co.uk/2008/12/roger-ballens-photograph-and-search-for.html> accessed 11 February 2013)

In one register it could be suggested that the responses to Ballen's work in general and to the photograph of Dresie and Casie in particular, reflects the attraction and repulsion of the other, the abject, the 'carnavalesque' (Stallybrass and White, 1986). But, what seems to mark the responses to this image as qualitatively different from the responses to the self-authored work of Gilbert and George, is the question of the power relation between the photographer and those photographed: as summarised by Coslovich, "did the twins understand the ramifications of that moment?" (2009, np). It could be argued that those who would seek to deny through visual exclusion the autonomy as well as the physicality of Dresie and Casie are, by the same token, seeking to preserve the integrity of the bourgeois *homo clausus* and deny its corporeality. This, however, leaves the question of authorial subjectivity unresolved: that is, whose subjectivity is being constituted and by whose authority?

6.5. Discussion

The overall aim of this chapter was to further explore the complex relationships, both centrifugal and centripetal, between the visual image, the subjectivities portrayed in and through the image, and the object's trajectory through the field of cultural production. To examine this the focus was on two double portraits, which in terms of how, who and what they represent, are potentially 'transgressive'.

As sensuous material artefacts the images offer up affordances or provocations to the viewer, which, although historically and socially contingent, nonetheless are stimulated by the materiality of the object in and of itself – its own specificity – the form and colour and content generated by (largely unseen) technical processes.

Although both images analysed here draw on photography the manipulation of the medium is distinctive. The image of, and by, Gilbert and George, is a form of 'bricolage', a number of discrete photographs of objects or materials blown up or reduced in scale, placed within or on top of a grid. The placement of the items, their colour and shape generate aesthetic effects of symmetry, line and contrast, while the distorted size and disproportionality of the objects represented expose the constructed nature of the image.

The aesthetic choice of black and white photographic film by Ballen produces its own formal qualities of light and shade, but also plays on the historical resonances of the medium and simultaneously evokes a documentary mode. As noted earlier, these evocations can include the mythic (Barthes, 1985 [1957]) dignity of poverty, or the classificatory 'mug shots' of the insane or criminal. By effectively obscuring the aesthetic choices of medium and selection of images, Ballen exploits photography's apparent fealty to reality to create its effects of 'truth'. The form thus generates an aesthetic response to the sensuous properties of the image, but also, perhaps, because of the resonances of the medium begins to provoke an evaluation of the imaged.

In both images the human subjects adopt a frontal pose. Earlier it was suggested that this pose carried with it an implied 'address' to, or the illusion of, a potential 'conversation' – an implied exchange/return of looks. Gilbert and George's pose in *Bloody Shit House*, is frontal, but the gaze is at a distance and away from the viewer, thereby denying the exchange of looks. In Ballen's photograph of *Dresie and Casie*, the pose and look is direct and close up to the photographer/viewer. Arguably, these formal arrangements could be interpreted as not just frontal, but 'confrontational' insofar as they return or reject the potentially shaming/abjecting gaze. As suggested earlier, Dresie and Casie's unabashed look could provoke a politicised reading which sees their presentation and representation as an empowering critique of bourgeois aesthetics and standards of beauty (in art and in physical form). But this is to oversimplify or even over look the series of power relations at play in the production and reception of the image. In particular it disregards

the relationship between the subject and the photographer and the role of power in the 'authoring' and authorising of the pose.

In portraiture frontality may intimate the consent (or complicity) of the subject, but Pointon (2013), writing in relation to 18th Century slave portraiture and Edwards' (1990) in his discussion of 19th Century portrait photography, draws attention to the power relations embedded within the portrait process, that is the ways in which the portrait process "replicates patterns of authority that have wider resonance" (Pointon, 2013, p.59). Edwards, looking at the relationship between photographer and subject distinguishes between bourgeois portraits (in which the subject and photographer are co-author) generative of a 'duologic'/participatory' gaze and the monological/objectifying gaze generated by, for example, 'mug shots' of criminals, where the participation may not be voluntary or based on informed consent. As noted earlier, in comparison with the self-authored, self-fashioned, naked pose of Gilbert and George, ethical (rather than aesthetic) concerns were raised regarding the degree to which Dresie and Casie consented to, or were fully aware of the implications of Ballen's photograph.

This differential concern is generated not just by Dresie and Casie's physicality but by the exposure of otherwise hidden bodily processes – saliva. As noted earlier, while the image of Gilbert and George is structured around faeces and blood photographically magnified this is not directly associable with the artist(s). The materials are abstracted from the corporeal and carry their own aesthetic qualities of colour and shape within the image. In the case of Dresie and Casie, this evidence of their own corporeality is integral to the pose. Further, because of the medium used by the photographer and its *apparent* unconstructed-ness this image poses a different set of questions from the images using similarly abject materials by Gilbert and George. In the case of Dresie and Casie, the photograph could be said to capture the 'reality' of Dresie and Casie – overflowing saliva is part of them, it is how they are and to portray them otherwise would have been an 'untrue' representation, and one that denies their identity. It could also

reflect a selection process – a choice of image for display and distribution from a series some of which might include the men without the dripping saliva. It could also be an artifice, a fiction, a ‘pose’, which Ballen has manipulated, just as Gilbert and George have manipulated their own image. As such it could be interpreted as aesthetically transgressive, undermining the idea and form of the portrait, and by extension challenging the social hierarchies of bourgeois bodily respectability, or it could be interpreted as a subjugating image, constituting Dresie and Casie in abjection.

In both cases other dimensions of abjection: Gilbert and George’s non-normative, ‘abject’ sexuality and Dresie’s and Casie’s identity as ‘poor whites’ opens on to a politics outwith, but imbricated in the interpretation of the image.

What this demonstrates is how (even) the sensuous or formal properties of the portrait, specifically the pose of the subject, are both constituted by and constitute a series of power relations. In addition to the power relation at the point of production of the pose, is the way in which the pose subsequently positions the (temporally and spatially situated) subject of the image viz-a-viz the (similarly temporally and situated) viewer. As suggested earlier, the ambiguous positioning of the viewer viz-a-viz Dresie and Casie is reflected in the analysis of the commentary on the images. This suggests that in responding to these images critics are uncertain whether to read the image as objectifying: rendering the twins mute and unknowing or uncomprehending objects of the viewer’s curiosity; or as a ‘performance’ giving visibility to knowing, “inquisitive” individuals. Arguably, in the space of uncertainty even the self-fashioned pose may become the monologic gaze of objectification (Edwards, 1990).

Second, the analysis draws attention to the processes by which these works are constituted and evaluated as ‘art’ and the producers recognised and evaluated as artists. In particular, the response to these images suggest the working of what Heinrich describes as the ‘permissive paradox’ (Heinich, in Danko, 2008), and Bourdieu (2004), “ritual acts of sacrilege” whereby works

that ostensibly question or breach some aesthetic boundary are effectively absorbed into and reinforce the field and enhance the position of the artists. Both images discussed here are consecrated as *art* objects and the producers positioned as artists, rather than as, for example photojournalists. As noted earlier, by the time *The Fundamental Pictures*, series was exhibited, Gilbert and George were already established artists within the avant-garde canon, and the critical commentary on their work situates it (paradoxically) within a lineage stretching back to the humanist impulse of Early Modern art. The exhibition and publication that included the photograph of Dresie and Casie was relatively early in Ballen's career, but this image in particular, seems to have contributed to his 'recognition' as an artist – indicated by the prices his prints command and the nomination of this photograph for the Citigate prize. Critical commentary, however, reflects the ambiguous positioning of the image between documentary and 'art' – a function, as suggested above, of the medium, but also of the content, itself a function of the truth effects photography (erroneously) produces. As a result less attention is given to the image's formal properties and location within a canon, and much more to the macro- or micro-political and ethical questions it provokes.

Third, the analysis again underlines portraiture's specificity, and in particular the capacity for slippage between the (aesthetic) evaluation of the image as material object and cultural artefact, and evaluation of the subject of the portrait. Further, it may also begin to suggest how the processes of evaluation of the object's sensuous properties and of cultural canonisation can work independently and together in constituting the subjectivity of the imaged. Two critical relations seem to be at play: the relation between producer of the image and the person(s) imaged – that is whether the image is a self-portrait or whether it is a portrait by the artists of others; and the processes by which the subjectivities and identities of those imaged come to be constituted or imputed from the visual image. Ironically, in the context of a consideration of visual images, or perhaps as another dimension of portraiture's specificity, what the analysis in chapter 5 and in this chapter begin to suggest is the contributory role of the 'voice' of the artist in constructing the aesthetic evaluation of the object as 'art' and in the

constitution and evaluation of the subjects/subjectivities of those portrayed. Chapter 5 described the processes of evaluation, canonisation and constitution of subjectivity in relation to self-portraits by an artist rendered voiceless by her premature death. This chapter illustrates how these processes play out in relation to a double self-portrait by artists who actively seek to construct their art and their self 'image', and in the context of a double portrait by an artist who 'speaks', but whose subjects are effectively mute.

In their self-portrait, Gilbert and George are artfully and knowingly active in constituting their own authorial subjectivity and social identity. The manipulation of the photographic medium and self-constituted 'fiction of the pose' (Berger, 1994) within the image is mirrored by their active self-fashioning outwith the picture plane. Paralleling their visual identity, both naked in the image and dressed in their 'responsibility suits' in public appearances, is their 'voice' in their pronouncements on their art, themselves and their politics. To the extent that the artists control the 'fiction of the pose' both within and outwith the picture plane they have the potential to exercise some (if not absolute) control over the conditions of their recognition as individual subjects of moral worth (Honneth, 2004; Sayer, 2005).

Ballen, too, is active in constituting his own authorial subjectivity, and in positioning his work. The subjects of his work, Dresie and Casie, are, however, silent. In the space of silence their physicality overwhelms and comes to be constitutive of an imputed subjectivity – perpetuated by Ballen's 'voice' and that of the commentators on the image. Arguably this image articulates the monologic gaze (Edwards, 1990) - but not just the unequal power relation between the photographer and subject, but also inequalities in ownership and control of the constitution of subjectivity. Dresie's and Casie's silence may open up, in Çakırlar's (2011) terms, the potential to return the shame gaze but equally (and perhaps simultaneously) exposes them to objectification (Nussbaum, 1995) and 'misrecognition' (Honneth, 2004; Sayer, 2005).

This is not to argue for some *a priori* 'authenticity' of 'voice'. As Youngblood Jackson (2010), for example, argues in the context of feminist qualitative research, the essentializing and romanticizing of 'voice', can work to replicate unequal power relations, perpetuating Otherness. If, as in Youngblood Jackson's reading (drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome) "silence can be resignified as resistance, as agency" (Youngblood Jackson, 2010, p. 707) Dresie's and Casie's own muteness may be a source of power. But while 'vocality' is no guarantor over how one's utterances will be interpreted (as interpretations of the work of Gilbert and George begin to suggest), as seen in the case of Ballen's photograph, in the absence of a voice outwith the picture plane Dresie and Casie are, nonetheless, at risk of being constituted in abjection by the bourgeois gaze.

6.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to examine what could be revealed of the relationships between the material object, the 'art object' and the constitution of subjectivity when looking at portraits pushed to the extremes in terms of how, who and what they represent. What it contributed to was an understanding not just of the inter-relationships between these three dimensions, but also of the complex relations of power weaved through.

Through the choice of the 'abject' as a conceptual frame – specifically its concerns with the constitution and fragility of social and psychic boundaries - there was an assumption that these images would provoke these considerations of power. It was, however, only through the detailed analysis of the images individually and, particularly, in comparison, that the complexity of these relations became apparent. This comparison underlined how the authoring and authorising of the pose may feed not just into 'aesthetic' evaluations of the image, qua image, but into aesthetic and ethical evaluation of the subjects of the images. Further it drew attention to the ways in which the 'voice' of the artist may work to position the viewing of the work as art (and their own position within the field of cultural production) and to the constitution of the subjectivities of the portraits objects. By the same token it revealed the potential duplicity of the image, that is, its

capacity to be both a vehicle for 'recognition' and for objectification and misrecognition, and as such raises the question "when is the power of the image turned against itself?" (Apel, 2005, p.100).

This question may take on added urgency in the digital economy where the cues for reading work as 'art' rather than reportage or social networking are increasingly ambiguous. The scope and limitations for self-fashioning in the age of digital reproduction will be considered in the next chapter.

7. An aura or a Blur? The work of portrayal in the age of digital reproduction

7.1 Introduction

"That which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art." (Benjamin, 1999a [1936], p.215)

Up until this point no attention has been paid to the ways in which the portraits discussed here have been reproduced for insertion into the text. Yet, as Walter Benjamin has argued, the very processes of (mechanical) reproduction and the parallel or associated (if not causal) changes in structures of perception have implications for the work of art's authenticity and the sense of its 'aura' (Benjamin (1999a [1936])). In this chapter, Benjamin's arguments provide the starting point for exploring the implications not just of the reproduction of the portrait as an (art) object, and one with sensuous properties, but also for the (re)production and (re)presentation of the subject/self as a portrait.

Benjamin's conceptualisations of 'aura' and 'authenticity' are significant in the current context in two ways. First, because of the way in which Benjamin's analysis focuses on 'aura' as an emergence from, and experience of, both the presentation and the representation of the human subject/the face. As Costello (2005) remarks, "the photographic images of the face have a privileged relation to the experience of aura" (p.180). In his essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* Benjamin identifies early portrait photography with the "last refuge for the cult value of the picture" (1999a [1936]) p.219). In his earlier work, *Brief History of Photography* (2009 [1931]), Benjamin compares the portrait photography of the early 1840s, such as that produced by the painter David Octavius Hill, with that of the 1880s, and associates what he sees as the loss of aura of the later photographic images not just with improvements in photographic technology, but also with the diminution of the substantive aura of the bourgeois subjects. For Benjamin, the later portraits are marked by the feigned aura of the 'age of decadence'. By contrast he writes approvingly of Eugene Atget's early 20th Century

photographs of Parisian street scenes, largely devoid of human presence, for “disinfect[ing] the stuffy atmosphere” of later commercial portrait photographs, and ushering in “the liberation of object from aura” (Benjamin, 2009 [1931] p.184). Similarly Benjamin promotes August Sander’s portraits of ‘types’ (see figure 6.3 in chapter 6), precisely for not being *portraits* as normally understood, but for their ethnographic/scientific purpose (Costello, 2005). Benjamin, however, appears to recuperate what Costello (2005) interprets as the ethical dimension of ‘aura’ in a later essay, *Some Motifs in Baudelaire* (1999b [1939]). Here Benjamin associates the decline in aura with mechanical technology’s “inhuman” gaze. Unlike the early daguerreotype which “records our likeness without returning our gaze”,

“To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return.” (Benjamin, 1999b [1939]), p.184)

Second, the questions Benjamin poses about the impact of techniques of reproduction on the ‘authenticity’ and ‘authority’ of the artwork takes on urgency in the context of the ‘hypermediated’ digital economy (Bolter and Grusin, 2000). At the point(s) of *production*, digital media put under increasing pressure the conceptualisation of the singular ‘artist-as-creator’ (Bourdieu, 2004; Fyfe, 1988), and bring into question issues of the original and authentic (and finite or contained) work of art. The multiple modes of reproduction and multiple points of distribution or dispersal (Joselit, 2011) and reception also pose significant questions about the acceleration of the loss of ‘aura’ (Benjamin, 1999a [1936]).

The dispersal of the means and mode of production, reproduction, distribution and reception of the image have their parallels in the postmodern experience and analysis of the dissolution of the link between the signifier and signified, between the ‘real’ and the representational and the substitution of the ‘real’ by the simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1984), and the fracturing of the unitary bourgeois subject. Authors such as Buchloh (1994) and van Alphen (1997) argue that portraiture has been a medium of

expression for this shattering of 'one-ness' and its replacement by the performative, the absent and the multiple:

"The portrait returns, but with a difference, now exemplifying a critique of the bourgeois self instead of its authority; showing a loss of self instead of its consolidation; shaping the subject as simulacrum instead of as origin." (van Alphen, 1997, p.242)

In the 20th and 21st Century a number of art movements have emerged which express or articulate this shattering of singularity of both the subject and object. Of particular relevance in this chapter is the concept and production of 'artist's multiples'. This includes the use of 'ready-made' objects, of which the "founding gesture" (Bury, 2001) was Duchamp's 'fountain' in 1917, but extends to Pop Art, the Fluxus movement and conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s, through to the later neo-conceptualism. Although defying definition and categorically elusive, for Bury, what these works share is that: "they are made by an artist (however defined), there is always more than one, the denial of the authentic 'original', and the insistence on the equality of each one in the 'edition'" (2001, p.38). Further, and underpinning the work, is an ostensible challenge or subversion of an art market predicated on connoisseurship, the hand of the artist and the unique object.

Yet, in the face of the de-centring of the self and the dispersal of the means of production, reproduction and modes of reception, previous chapters have revealed the pull of the discrete, the singular and the 'authentic'.⁹² The apparent persistence of the portrait's singularity as object and subject would seem to raise the question whether the 'aura' and authenticity of the portrait as art object has (just) withered away, or whether it has been reconfigured in some way, and if so, with what effects, on the object, the art and the imaged?

⁹² The attempt in each of the chapters to explore the portraits as material objects, arguably also not only reflects, but also as a method, *reproduces* the institutional consecration of the art object's uniqueness by focusing on the singularity of the image, even as the articulation of its 'aesthetic' effects is socially and historically situated.

To explore (if not definitively answer) these questions, this chapter takes a slightly contrary approach - examining the implications for the auratic and authentic through the converse of the singular - the 'multiple' portrait; multiple as in 'group portrait', but also multiple in terms of the method and technology of production, the modes of reproduction and distribution, and the spaces of reception.

The 'case study' for this analysis will be a set of portraits representing the four members of the pop group Blur, produced in 2000 by the artist Julian Opie (1958 -) (figure 7.1).



Figure 7.1
Julian Opie
Blur: The best of
2000
As individual portraits:
C-type print on wooden board

The set was commissioned for the cover of the band's *Best of* album. At one level the image (comprising the four individual portraits) constitutes an 'original' 'art' work, but one intended to be reproduced and distributed via

multiple means for consumption or reception and interpretation by multiple viewers. Based on digital photographs of the four individual band members and subsequently manipulated using computer software, both the means of its production and subsequent reproduction draw on digital technology and its capacity for “endless variation” (Hand, 2012). The image itself featured on the CD cover (see figure 7.3 below) and on the sides of buses, advertising hoardings and posters. But it was also displayed in an art gallery as part of an exhibition of the artist’s work and achieved institutional consecration by being purchased on behalf of the National Portrait Gallery in London, effecting a transition from multiple to unique object; from consumer good to artwork circulating in the market of symbolic goods. Running in parallel is the ubiquity of the four men portrayed: the subjectivities expressed in and through the image; their control and ownership over their own (re)presentation, and their own claims for authenticity/’greatness’.

As such this image raises a number of interesting questions in relation to the singularity and ubiquity of the portrait as material object, as ‘art object’ and as representation of the individual subject, in the age of digital production, reproduction, distribution and reception. To set the theoretical context the following section briefly summarises Benjamin’s conceptualisation of ‘aura’ and authenticity. This is followed by an overview of the ‘multiple’: as art movement; as means of production, reproduction and circulation; and as a mechanism of visibility. Sections 7.4, 7.5 and 7.6 present an analysis of the image. As in the previous chapters these will broadly focus on the image as sensuous object, on the questions of subjectivity that it opens on to, and its position within the field of cultural production. The final section will attempt to consider what this set of portraits affords for an understanding of ‘aura’ and ‘authenticity’ in the age of the multiple, the dispersed and the hypermediated.

7.2 Aura, authenticity and the gaze returned: the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction

Benjamin recognises that works of art have always been reproducible, but the transition from “man-made” to specifically *mechanical* means of

reproduction represents a qualitative shift. For Benjamin, the capacity for photography to reproduce works of art and the subsequent development of the 'art of the film' had significant repercussions not only for art, but also 'beyond the realms of art' (1999a [1936]), p.215).

For Benjamin, what the photographic reproduction of the work of art⁹³ lacks, is "its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (1999a [1936]), p.214). While *manual* reproduction preserves the object's 'authority', *technical* mechanisms undermine it. This, Benjamin argues, is because mechanical means of reproduction are more 'independent' of the original – capable of revealing aspects of the art object that may not be visible to the naked eye⁹⁴ and because the reproduced image can be transmitted to and received within contexts not possible for the original object: "it enables the original to meet the beholder halfway" (1999a [1936]), p.214). This capacity for dispersal "depreciates" the art object's "authenticity", that is "the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced" (1999a [1936]), p.215). By making possible the production and distribution of a "plurality of copies", what mechanical reproduction brings about, for Benjamin, is a "shattering of tradition" and, as a corollary, the withering away of the 'aura' of the work of art.

As noted above, Benjamin first explored the concept of 'aura' in his 1931 essay *Brief History of Photography* (2009 [1931]). Here he defines aura as "A gossamer fabric woven in space and time: a unique manifestation of remoteness, however close at hand" (p.184). This articulation of 'aura' as a sense of distance despite the (physical) proximity of the object of attention is repeated in the *Work of Art* essay where he defines it as "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be" (Benjamin (1999a

⁹³ In Benjamin's account the paradigmatic work of art evoked appears to be physical object or entity - a painting, or sculpture with a physical presence in time and space. This immediately throws into relief the problem of adapting Benjamin's account to works of art that do not have a concrete physical presence (the implications for music cannot be addressed here).

⁹⁴ Ironically, as Mitchell (1992) argues, the shift from analogue to digital means of reproduction may undermine this revelatory function.

[1936], p.216). Here, and in the later *Motifs* essay (1999b [1939]), Benjamin further describes this sense of proximal distance as the object's 'inapproachability': a characteristic associated with the 'cult' or 'ceremonial image'.

This reference to the 'cult' function of the object alludes to Benjamin's understanding of the historical relationship between the work of art and its location within the "fabric of tradition": a fabric which may shift, but which, until the emergence of photography and film, leaves the "unique value of the 'authentic' work of art" (1999a [1936]), p.217), from which it derives its 'aura', intact. Thus, from its roots in the ritual context of magic and then subsequently religion, the 'ritualistic basis' of the work of art extends into the secularized 'cult of beauty' from the Renaissance onwards. Integral to these shifts is the way in which works of art are received and valued. The 'use value' of the ceremonial objects of the cult rested on the fact that they existed as instruments of magic, not that they would necessarily be seen. As the objects became separated and separable from religious ritual, their function shifted to one of 'exhibition', or "public presentability". Mechanical reproduction accelerates this shift toward exhibition value, and, by definitively separating art from its basis in cult presages the "liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage" (Benjamin, 1999a [1936]), p.215), removes the basis for art's autonomy (from social/political life) and results in the diminution of the aura of both the art object and subject of the art. The aura emanating from early portrait photographs is thus replaced by Atget's photographs of deserted Paris streets; the aura of the stage actor and of the figure he or she portrays, is replaced by the fragmented, de-corporealized performance of the film actor; the painter as magician maintaining his or her distance from reality, is substituted by the cameraman as surgeon, permeating deep in to reality.

For Benjamin this runs in parallel with changes in structures of perception, a process he associates with the "increasing significance of the masses in contemporary life" and their:

"Desire...to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly...[and] their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction...Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction." (1999a [1936]), p.217)

The reception of images also changes: in place of the individual, contemplation of, and absorption by, a 'unique' work of art (with all this implies for the 'expert's' understanding of the 'rules of art'), reception (particularly of film and architecture), is marked by collective and "distracted viewing", and one, in relation to film, marked by constant change or 'shocks'. For Benjamin this distraction has the potential to mobilize the audience - providing solutions for difficult tasks:

"Distraction as provided by art presents a covert control of the extent to which new tasks have become soluble to apperception. Since, moreover, individuals are tempted to avoid such tasks, art will tackle the most difficult and most important ones where it is able to mobilize the masses. Today it does so in film." (1999a [1936]), p.233)

As this underlines, Benjamin's analysis aims to address the dual implications of mechanical reproduction: on the work of art and for the political function of art. Commentators such as Ziarek (2005) and Franklin (2002) note that while Benjamin recognizes the risks these technologies bring of aestheticizing experience, he also sees their potential for collective mobilization. As summarised by Ziarek, for Benjamin, "dispelling the auratic existence of artworks, renders them political in novel and radical ways" (2005, p.211).

As Costello (2005), however, points out, Benjamin seems to vacillate between welcoming the diminution of aura and what it suggests for the "emancip[ation] of the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual" (Benjamin, 1999 [1936]) p.218), and mourning the loss of what Costello refers to as the "ethical dimension to auratic experience" (Costello, 2005, p.176). Costello suggests a distinction, in Benjamin, between a specific (photographic or technological) and a general, ethical, experiential dimension to aura. Because photography records, but does not (at an intersubjective level) return the gaze, the loss of aura is to be welcomed as

part of the disenchantment of the world. But at the more general experiential level, its loss is to be regretted if it implies an inability to respond to the “particularity of others” (Costello, 2005).

7.3 The work of art in the age of ubiquity: producing, circulating and being multiple

7.3.1 Context

To illustrate his argument Benjamin describes two processes: the implications of the *reproduction* of what may be thought of as the paradigmatic ‘art’ work - the hand worked painting attributable to a named artist, directly experienced by an individual viewer; and the implications of visual works, specifically photographs and films, created using reproductive technologies, experienced (potentially) by multiple viewers within and across time and space. Photography and film may include reproductions of art works but are also creative products in their own right; that is they are reproducible (and often representational) but not (necessarily) *reproductions* of other pre-existing artworks.

Since Benjamin wrote his essay, the introduction of digital technology has extended the potential for the reproduction and multiple dispersal of ‘original’ artworks (all the images included in this thesis, for example, have been downloaded from the internet). It is also a technology that can be used for both the production and the *re*-production of works, in the sense that the technology allows for further manipulation of the image by other producers/artists, potentially infinitely deferring the ‘finished’ object.

Historically, as discussions of studio processes, and the use of other techniques of image production and reproduction such as sculpture, engraving, screen printing and photography, suggest (Becker, 1984; Fyfe, 1988; Krauss, 1981), the unique painting produced by a single/singular individual may itself be something of a special case, albeit one that may serve a particular ideological position. But the singular artwork/artist (and the ideological support) has also been put under increasing pressure by art

movements, which, at the level of content, as well as production techniques, have emphasised not singularity, but multiplicity, ubiquity and the commonplace.

These shifts suggests that the relationship between singularity/multiplicity and 'aura' may be even more complex, particularly in the context of digital media, than could have been anticipated by Benjamin, and one, which, in relation to portraiture may have particular implications for the subject imaged, and the viewing subject.

Before looking at the image itself (figure 7.1) in more detail, the following considers three dimensions of 'multiplicity' that in different ways are at play in relation to this image: artists' multiples (art practices); the digitally multiple (technologies of production and reproduction); and being multiple - celebrity and visibility.

7.3.2 'Image duplicators'⁹⁵: Artists' multiples

As has been discussed in earlier chapters, the concept of the individual 'artist-as-creator' whose work expresses his or her unique vision, can be said to articulate a 'charismatic' ideology which, while making the author "the first and last source of the value of his work" conceals the role of the "cultural businessman", in the consecration and valorisation of the work (Bourdieu, 2004, p.76). As Fyfe suggests, this encompasses, as two sides of the same coin, the "idea of the artist as expressing the free-play of a coherent creative will, to which pictorial means are subordinate" (Fyfe, 1988, p.73), and the institutional practices, the work of the field of cultural production in constituting the artist (Bourdieu, 2004).

But even within these parameters the actual practice of art suggests conceptualisations of originality and individual creativity will be historically specific and dynamic. The very concept of genres, for example, carries with it assumptions of categorisation and thematic standardisation. In addition, as

⁹⁵ From Lobel (2002).

Loh (2004) argues in relation to Italian Baroque art of the 17th century, “premodernist artists enacted a certain type of originality that was located precisely in the imitation of great masters and in the competitive repetition of eternal tropes” (Loh, 2004, p.478). In other words, the recognition of pastiched materials, such as mythical *Bacchanals*, generated its own aesthetic pleasures. According to Kahng (2007) this particular form of ‘copying’, as a positive part of the Western academic tradition “fell from grace” as part of modernism’s concerns around issues of authenticity and originality. This, however, did not preclude individual artists from repeating their own “tropes”, perhaps as a way of working out an idea (Kahng, 2007) and, in the process, generating works which are then treated (institutionally) as individual art works. Van Gogh’s painting of Sunflowers, for example, the paradigmatic ‘unique’ work of an artist constituted in their singularity (Heinich, 1997) exists as a multiple of seven versions: four oil paintings and three copies that depart in detail from the ‘originals’ (Frances Spurling, 2014, Guardian, 17 January, np).

It is, however, in the 20th Century that the use of the multiple as integral to the artwork itself became a self-conscious critical move - a mode of “repetition as resistance” (Kahng, 2007). The use by artists such as Duchamp, the Pop artists and conceptual and ‘postmodern’ artists (see Bury, 2001), of the ‘ready made’ or ‘found’ object as the artwork or to produce the artwork, and/or the use of repetition, multiplication, parody or pastiche in the artwork itself, has been interpreted as representing a critique of the market economy. This may be a critique of consumer society in general as well as of the commodification of art as a specific manifestation of the market’s dominance (see, for example, Bury, 2001; Foster, 2012; Frith and Horne, 1987; Kahng, 2007; Moorhouse, 2007). For Loh (2004), works premised on repetition share “a desire to subvert the institutionalization and commercialisation of artistic production by denying unique authorship and objecthood to the work of art” (p.477). It is a means for artists to interrogate the “gap between use value and exchange value” (Bury, 2001, p.24). In a context of commodification and ‘fetishisation’ of cultural products “governed by the principle of their realization as value, and not by their own

specific content and harmonious value" (Adorno, 1991, p.99), artists have used the form and content of "standardised" (Adorno, 1991), mass produced consumer goods to create its opposite: an (ostensibly) autonomous art. As expressed by one commentator, "the [multiple] should have no 'utility' value other than its being an art object" (Bury, 2001, p. 28). However, as highlighted in chapter 6, even 'subversive' art is subject to 'repackaging' and absorption into the field (Bourdieu, 2004). Ganis (1999), for example, discussing Warhol's Jackie series (based on newspaper photographs of Jackie Kennedy) observes that although this comprises over 325 prints and paintings the art market regards each of these works as a Warhol 'original', and the price of each is equal to that of individual paintings by other artists.

The rules of the game are further shored up by the constant reference back to a named, identified, identifiable creator or collective ('Warhol', 'Lichtenstein', 'Peter Blake' etc.).^{*} Without this, both the monetary value and status of the work as art is in jeopardy (Zolberg, 1997). This manifests itself even in relation to works using (pre-digital) reproductive techniques such as printing and analogue photography, where earlier numbered editions are given a higher market value. This is not just because of their assumed higher quality, but because they are considered to be closer to the artist's conception (Ganis, 1999; Krauss, 1981; Zolberg, 1997). Again taking Warhol's Jackie multiples as an example, although the screenprinting process does not necessarily produce poorer quality prints over time, the lower numbered prints still have higher monetary value (Ganis, 1999).

In what could constitute a double or triple game some artists, 'play' or exploit the market. Warhol, for example, a self-confessed 'Business Artist' (Walker, 1987, p.28) is regarded by some commentators as using the market rather than opposing or exploiting it (Frith and Horne, 1987; Ganis, 1999;

^{*} As discussed in chapter 5, for Foucault (1991a [1969]) the name of the 'the author' (or artist), is an effect of discourse and to be distinguished from the 'real writer'. Perhaps obliquely, the example of artists collectives underlines this; the works become identified with the name of the collective rather than that of the individuals who contribute to the collective, who may remain anonymous. For examples of contemporary artists collectives see <http://www.modernedition.com/art-articles/art-collectives/artist-collectives.html> (accessed 24 April 2015).

Walker, 1987), signing “any object whatever” (Edmund White, in Danto, 1999, p.71), and willing, in his commissioned portraits, “to grant the request for an even mythical identity to be bestowed upon those both willing and able to pay for it” (Buchloh, 1994, p.62). In the 1990s, Damien Hirst, one of the ‘Young British Artists’, adopted a similar position. Described by Cook (2000) as representing “a new kind of entrepreneurial market oriented artist” (2000, p.173), Hirst, like Warhol before him, used ‘factory’ line production methods to produce his multiple ‘spot’ and ‘spin paintings’. For Cook (2000), however, what distinguishes the two artists is the degree to which they are regarded as playing the market “ironically” or “candidly” (Cook, p.173, on Warhol), or “cheapen their product for the sake of quicktime profit” (Cook, p.175, on the risks facing the young British artists, including Hirst).

7.3.3 Digitally multiple

Production technologies

Technologies of production, particularly those using inherently reproductive processes such as cast sculpture, engraving, photography, film and digital media, place a distance (both physical and authorial) between the work and the (assumed) ‘hand’ of the artist, bringing into question criteria of judgement and value based on assessments of the material uniqueness and conceptual originality. While there are, as Hand (2012) and Lister (1995) argue, continuities and discontinuities between pre-digital and digital production technologies, digital technologies increase the stakes in terms of who and what constitutes the art and the artist as well as modes of perceiving art.

Like analogue photography, digital media can be used as a means of both image production and reproduction. The underpinning technology of digital media, however, marks it out as distinctive along a number of linked dimensions.⁹⁷ First, and fundamentally, digital media are based on binary code: that is, they are based on mathematical, not chemical processes

⁹⁷ It is not intended here to undertake a detailed examination of the implications of digital media and the digital economy. The following just draws attention to some of the issues of relevance to the case study image.

(Cubitt, 2006; Hand, 2012). Second, images produced digitally can be reproduced without deterioration, unlike, for example, prints made from analogue photography. Digital images can therefore be reproduced infinitely with the first copy being the same quality as all subsequent copies.⁸ Third, because digital images are based on numerical code they can be “altered, decomposed and recombined and presented in a seamless and perfect print” (Hall, 1999, p.274). By extension, as these images circulate as ‘information flows’ this manipulation and variation can be undertaken by multiple ‘artists’, ‘authors’ or ‘creators’. In the absence of a ‘negative’ or print of an ‘original’ image, there is, however, no way of discerning this manipulation or the source of alteration. The absence of an ‘audit trail’ makes it harder to determine the ‘provenance’ of an image (Mitchell, 1992; Savedoff, 1997). There is, in effect no finality (in principle) in relation to the image and no fixed creator: “After digitization, it is arguably the case that modernist ideas of fixity, permanence and capture are giving way to notions of mobility, ephemerality and performance” (Hand, 2012, p.26). For artworks in particular this shift from the fixed to the fugitive carries with it specific implications for both authorship and authorising:

“We must abandon the concept of an art world populated by stable, enduring, finished works, and replace it with one that recognizes continual mutation and proliferation of variants...Notions of individual authorial responsibility for image content, authorial determination of meaning, and authorial prestige are correspondingly diminished.” (Mitchell, 1992, p.52)

Finally, unlike analogue photography, digital media require no concrete referent, no ‘real’ or ‘original’, nothing from which to capture reflected light. Although, as Hand (2012) points out, analogue photography has always been malleable and partial, there is a socially constituted assumption that the photograph has an indexical relationship to the world, that it (literally) creates an analogy with the world (Cubitt, 2006). Arguably, this assumption of indexicality gives the photographic image its own ‘authenticity’. The shift

⁸ The issue of what has been called ‘bit rot’ may, however, undermine the apparent availability of the images over time (see for example (Samuel Gibbs, Guardian, Friday 13 February, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/feb/13/what-is-bit-rot-and-is-vint-cerf-right-to-be-worried> (accessed, 24 April 2015)).

from a chemical to a digital process makes it harder to sustain this assumed link with the 'real'. In the context of the 'art' object, Mitchell (1992) argues that it places the digital 'photograph' on a spectrum between painting, understood as an articulation of an artist's 'intention', and analogue photography's ostensible record of an actual object. Given portraiture's own interstitial position between documentary record and 'artwork' (see chapter 3) digital technology may raise particular issues for the 'authenticity' of the portrait and the 'aura' of the portrayal.

Circulating multiples: reproduction, distribution, reception and re-production

As noted earlier, Benjamin's (1999a [1936]) argument addresses both the mechanical means for producing 'art forms' (e.g. films) and the reproduction of (pre-existing) art works. Both dimensions have implications for the works in terms of by whom, where and when they are seen, and also for how they are perceived.

Digital technologies may create the conditions for a quantitative and qualitative shift in terms of *who* can render and re-render an image. Potentially at least, "digital simulation makes everyone author ['artist'] and reader" (Savedoff, 2005, p.33), anyone, that, is with access to a computer, the internet and the requisite skills.⁹⁹

Digital technologies also extend the opportunities for the on-going 're-making' of works (Hand, 2012), by multiple authors across networks. In effect, what digital technologies may presage is an incremental shift from visual images as "immutable mobiles" (Latour, 1990) – that is images which can be recreated and changed in scale while retaining "optical consistency" – to one of 'mutable' mobiles. By this is meant that not only can an image be extensively reproduced and circulated,¹⁰⁰ it can (potentially) be subject to endless manipulation and variation in the course of its circulation. In place

⁹⁹ As the concept of the 'digital divide' suggests digital technology can both reproduce and create new hierarchies (see for example, Jackson et al, 2008).

¹⁰⁰ Even if the form and context of its reception may fundamentally alter its meaning.

of the singular 'artist-as-creator', 'origin' may be dispersed and uniqueness becomes fleeting and transient.

By their very nature, reproductive technologies imply potentially multiple 'viewers' over time and in space. What digital technologies do is allow for extending this dispersion or distribution of 'copies'. As Hand (2012) argues:

"The informational character of the digital image changes how it can circulate, who has access to it and, given the number of contexts within which it can be embedded, what it can mean." (p.72)

Thus, in place of the direct one-to-one relationship between artwork and viewer in the context of a gallery or museum, digital technologies increase the capacity for (artists) and art works to circumvent these established channels of distribution (Scrivener and Clements, 2010). Instead they may circulate through different networks in different formats and received, downloaded, purchased, converted, shared and deleted, by multiple 'viewers' (albeit individually) in multiple social, historical and physical contexts.

As a corollary, what Frith and Horne (1988) describe as the "conditions of reception" of artworks will also be extended, expanded and shaped by the contexts in which they will be valued, interpreted and used. This includes the different spatial, temporal and sensory contexts in which artworks can be experienced.

This expansion of the contexts within which artworks are encountered - away from the socially and physically constituted space of the museum or art gallery, to different social, physical and virtual environments; environments saturated with visual images, may have implications for how attention is engaged (Lister, 1998). Viewing may be more a series of "glances" rather than the considered reflection of the "gaze" (Bolter and Grusin, 2000; Hand, 2012). It may, arguably, be closer to Benjamin's "distracted" film-goer, exposed to a series of "shocks", than the contemplative, absorbed connoisseur.

The digital circulation of images is also seen as means for extending (in space and over time) the sites of meaning generation. Hand (2012), for example, argues, that “the unprecedented mobility of the digital image through potentially infinite contexts, *intensifies* polysemic interpretation” (p.69, emphasis in original). The evaluative criteria applied and the conceptualisations of ‘originality’ may also shift. The differences in scale, colour, texture and resolution of digitally produced art and the different contexts in which these works may be experienced may ‘de-emphasise’ concerns with formal qualities (Sweeny, 2005), to be replaced by a new ‘visual language’ adding “fonts, photographic images, motion, time, sound and space (hypertext)...to the vocabulary of art” (Hall, 1999, p.273).

For Benjamin (1999a [1936]) the reproduction of artworks diminishes the aura generated by the direct experience of the physical presence of the ‘original’. In the context of digital media, some commentators such as Hall (1999) argue that, “the ‘aura’ of a work may be destroyed or displaced by repetition, celebrity or cult value” (p.276). Others make the case that ubiquity and diffusion through reproduction have the capacity to add to ‘aura’, (socially) constituting both the artist (Fyfe, 1988), and the ‘power’ of the artwork (Bann, in Kahng, 2007), giving it greater currency.¹⁰¹ What is perhaps implicit in both sides of the argument is the desire to retain the sense of otherness, ineffability, autonomy and ‘distance’ of art, however it is produced or reproduced: that is, to retain its ‘aura’.

7.3.4 Being multiple: visibility and celebrity

In relation to the representation of the self or subject, digital technology expands the potential field of visibility not only of the visual image but also of the subject(s) of the image. For Pointon (2013), dispersal via digital media extends questions of authentication as applied to both:

¹⁰¹ My own non-participant observation of digital photographs being made of ‘original’ artworks revealed the degree of creativity required on the part of the photographer to obtain a good photographic reproduction (including recourse to ‘Photoshop’ software to enhance the image so that it is closer to the ‘original’).

"...Portraits by famous artists or celebrated subjects accessible through Wikipedia or through online galleries selling reproductions acquire, simply by being there, an authority that has everything to do with mass circulation of digital information and may have nothing to do with artistic provenance or biographical authenticity." (p.15)

It also extends the potential for visibility to be used as a tool or weapon that can be both empowering and disempowering (Brighenti, 2007). This was touched upon in the previous chapter's concern with the potential for 'misrecognition' of the subject(ivities) portrayed. In this chapter, the focus shifts to the use of the media of visibility to constitute and reinforce identifiability through diffusion. This refers to the capacity to generate and control the production and distribution of the representations of a few (e.g. band members) to render them familiar to the many ('fans', putative consumers, "communities of admiration" (Heinich, nd)), to generate positive (in both senses of the word) identification of the few by the many. In other words, this chapter touches upon the role of portraiture in the operation of the asymmetrical visibility (Brighenti, 2007) associated with celebrity.

"Inaccessible as a person and simultaneously all available in his/her images: this is the very property of anyone possessing a capital of visibility." (Heinich, nd, p.7)

At what Brighenti (2007) calls the "intersection of the two domains of aesthetics...and politics", 'visibility', in the context of celebrity has been defined as "the diffusion of the face and name in public space" (Heinich, nd, p.1). As commentators such as Heinich (nd) and Thompson (2005) note, this diffusion of 'face and name' is not a contemporary phenomenon, nor specific to digital technologies or other communications media such as print media, television or film. It is also not determined by these technologies: rather, they change what it is possible to do (Hand, 2012). Whether and how these possibilities will become manifest will depend on the social practices within which and from which they emerge, and, as such, as Brighenti (2007) notes, are imbricated by relations of power.

In the context of 'celebrity', what different technologies of diffusion have afforded is the freeing up of visibility from "the spatial and temporal

properties of the here and now" (Thompson, 2005, p.35). Expanded possibilities through painting, sculpture, print, coinage and banknotes, and subsequently telecommunications and digital media break the direct link between physical presence and visibility. For the powerful it opens up the potential to diffuse a "fabricated" self-image (Brilliant, 2002 [1991; Thompson, 2005); an image of the 'greatness' of the few (however 'greatness' is defined or attributed (Heinich, nd)) distributed to the many.¹⁰² No longer physically present, a sense of physical presence is, nonetheless generated through making a visible 'likeness' – of a face, to the extent, as Heinich suggests that "faces matter as much, if not more, than names" (nd, p.2). Arguably, then, it is through the diffusion of a portrait that celebrity is both generated and sustained, contributing to the illusory sense of the celebrity's accessibility (and hence to their "capital of visibility" (Heinich nd)).

As a number of commentators note, the visibility of power and celebrity has, historically, been asymmetrical – from the few to the many, between seeing and being seen, between those able to control how and whether they are made 'visible' and those either exposed to the dominating (and gendered) gaze of the other, or rendered wholly invisible (Brighenti, 2007). However, it is also double-edged; the expanded technical possibilities for diffusion also reduce the control of the powerful over their visibility, exposing them, on the one hand to scrutiny and the risk of 'scandal' (Thompson, 2005).¹⁰³ On the other hand, the emotional or erotic charge of the image of the celebrity can also turn back on the subject, "if (fans) feel strangely possessed *by* their idols, they take their revenge in the imaginary possession *of* them" (Frith and Horne, 1987, p.20).

Within the 'spectacular society' of post second world war Western consumer capitalism, the presence of the celebrity in the form of ubiquitous visibility is

¹⁰² The parallel being the surveillance of the many by the few (Foucault, 1991b [1975]).

¹⁰³ Digital technology also expands the potential for a self-image – a "networked self" (Bolter and Grusin, 2000) to be distributed by the many to the many – the phenomena of the 'selfie' being a recent dimension of this. As with celebrity images, this can also lead to a loss of control over the image as it circulates through different communication networks.

mirrored in what is conceptualised as the ‘absence’ or ‘vacating’ of subjectivity (of the ‘real’) from the image. Celebrities are “stars made out of blank bodies” (Frith and Horne, 1987, p.169), no longer a “unique” self, but “a subject in the image of the star” (van Alphen, 1997, p.243), “public substitutes of subjectivity” (Buchloh, 1994, p.62). They are, in Baudrillard’s (1984) conceptualisation, ‘simulacrum’.

For portraiture, the response has been to ostensibly critique or expose what Buchloh describes as the “total commodification of the image of the subject” (1994, p.63) (even as it sustains it), such as in the portraits of ‘celebrities’ by Warhol. But also, as in the work of Julian Opie, to which we now turn, to play the ubiquitous image as surface: constituting the star(s) as cartoon(s).

7.4 Blur portrayed

7.4.1 Background

The set of portraits (figure 7.1) used as cover art for the pop group Blur’s *Best of* album will be used to explore both what it affords as a ‘singular’ image as well as the impact of these dimensions of multiplicity and dispersal on the work of the portrait. Commissioned around the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century from the artist Julian Opie, the image is a c-type colour print¹⁰⁴ based on photographs of the four individual members of the band - Damon Albarn, Graham Coxon, Alex James and Dave Rowntree (figure 7.1). For ease of reference, figure 7.2 identifies the individual band members as they appear on the album cover.

¹⁰⁴ A c-print (or chromogenic-print) is a photographic process for producing prints from a colour negative or slide or from digital images. Originally developed by Kodak in the 1950s it involves the reaction of two chemicals that work together to produce the print (Source: Visual Voice Collections; <http://www.visualvoicecollections.com/2012/07/05/q-a-what-is-a-c-print/> (accessed 25 April 2015)). A *digital* c-type print is a chromogenic photographic print made from a digital file rather than a negative (Source: Metro Print: <http://www.metro-print.co.uk/what-is-a-digital-c-type?forumboardid=10&forumtopicid=10> (accessed 25 April 2015)).

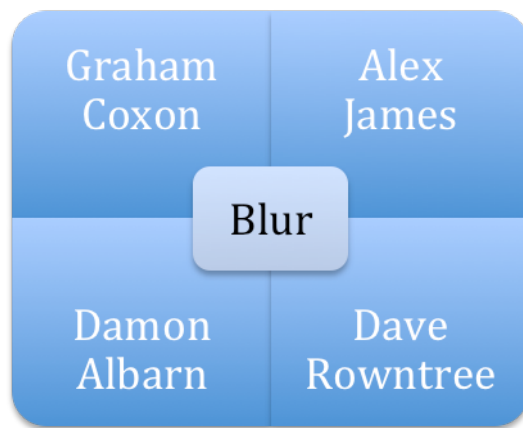


Figure 7.2 Who's who on *Blur: The best of* CD cover



Figure 7.3: *Blur: The best of* CD cover

When the album was released in 2000 the image was used not just on the CD/album cover (figure 7.3) but also on the accompanying promotional material. As a result, like Ballen's image of Dresie and Casie (figure 6.2), (but for quite dissimilar reasons and through dissimilar routes), this has become Opie's 'signature' piece (notwithstanding the absence of an actual 'signature'). A trawl of newspaper articles published between 2000 – 2013

commenting on the artist's work, for example, consistently locate and identify Opie as the artist who produced the cover of Blur's *The best of* album. Opie had, however, been an established artist since 1982.

The image is composed of four individual portraits¹⁰⁵ - one for each member of the band. Notwithstanding the ubiquity of the set as record cover image and promotional material, there are, apparently, only three complete ('original') sets, one of which is in the National Portrait Gallery, London. The four separate portraits were shown as part of an exhibition of Opie's work at Lisson Gallery in London in 2001. They were also reproduced in a monograph of Opie's portraits (Opie, 2003). In common with the other portraits in the monograph, all of which are in a similar pictorial style, the four portraits have the titles indicating forename and social role: 'Damon, singer. 2000'; 'Dave, drummer. 2000'; 'Graham, guitarist. 2000'; and 'Alex, bassist, 2000'. The individual portraits can also be viewed on the artist's website, together with information on the medium used and the three different sizes in which the portraits were made available.¹⁰⁶ Despite their ostensible reproducibility, however, the individual portraits are not downloadable from the website. Similarly, the versions held by the National Portrait Gallery can be viewed online but are not downloadable because the rights do not belong to the Gallery. The album cover image, while downloadable from Wikipedia, also comes with the caveat that the image is 'non free content'.

As just this short précis suggests, the image and the four component portraits provide fertile ground for exploring the implications of multiple modes of production and reproduction, to which Benjamin's analysis was so prescient in drawing attention, but which have unfolded in some ways at least that perhaps he could not have anticipated. Following the broad structure of the previous chapters, the following address the image, the imaged and the processes of institutionalisation.

¹⁰⁵ For the sake of consistency, the term 'image' will be used when referring to the set of four portraits; and 'portrait' when referring to the individual component pictures.

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.julianopie.com/#/artwork/painting/2000> (accessed 14 June 2015).

7.4.2 Damon, Dave, Graham and Alex: A group portrait

The image (as cover art) comprises a square constituted by four rectangles. Within each rectangle is what appears to be a drawing of the head and shoulders of a different young white man. Although adopting the form of the traditional portrait, each face comprises the sparest of details; a black line gives the shape of the face, the eyebrows, mouths and noses are indicated by black lines and dashes, the eyes are black dots. In one of the portraits spots of white give the illusion of a catchlight (light reflected on the eyes), in a second portrait white lines on the 'surface' of the young man's glasses serve the same purpose – white squares perhaps suggesting the reflection of windows. There is no further 'modelling' of the faces, no blemishes, creases, shadowing, hair growth etc. on the 'skin', just a smooth surface in one colour.

Within this very limited graphic vocabulary however, the four men are each given a distinctive physical identity. Their different characteristics are indicated by the slightly different 'skin' tones used for the face and neck of each man.¹⁰⁷ The thick black line marking the shape of the face suggests differences between, for example 'Alex's' slightly rounder face compared with 'Dave's' longer, thinner face. The shapes and thickness of the eyebrows, and the length, shape and position of the lines and dots drawn above the 'mouth' to suggest a nose, also work to create a sense of the distinct physical presence of each of the subjects. Two of the men are drawn with glasses, but one has rimless spectacles, the other wears 'designer' glasses with the imprint of a brand logo on the thick black frames. Three of the four men wear T-shirts of different colours, but one, 'Damon', wears a blue shirt with a white neckerchief or tie. He also wears a gold earring. All four have short(ish) hair, the reflection and shading marked by the introduction of several colours. Red-headed 'Dave' and dark-haired 'Graham' are presented with comparatively neat haircuts, Alex's dark fringe, however, strays across his face, while brown-haired 'Damon's' hair looks ruffled, and his fringe too

¹⁰⁷ The colours in the portraits reproduced in the *Portrait* book (Opie, 2003) are subtler than is suggested by figure 7.1. This suggests that reproduction technologies too can introduce elements of difference. As Fyfe (1988) notes, technologies of distribution may both erase and create their own 'aesthetic' properties.

hangs spikily across one side of his forehead. And then there is the shape of the mouth and the 'look' to the viewer. 'Dave' and 'Graham' look face on to the viewer, Graham with the 'upper lip' portrayed slightly downturned, Dave's slightly upturned, suggesting a smile. 'Alex' is portrayed with his head slightly to one side, the lines for his mouth like 'Dave's' suggesting a slight smile. It is, however, 'Damon', who appears the most 'animated', his head tilted to one side and the line of his 'mouth' most closely resembling a 'smile to camera'.

As a total image it could be considered a group portrait (in itself a form of 'multiple'), but unlike most group portraits there is no sense of interaction between the four young men. Within the square they are structurally 'connected' on two sides with two other band members but, like stamps in an album, they are each in their own separate 'spaces'. The different solid blocks of colour that comprise the 'background' to each portrait underline this separateness: yellow ('Graham'), blue ('Alex'), pink ('Dave') and green ('Damon'). They also each individually 'look' out directly to the viewer – not toward each other.¹⁰⁸

The combination of primary colours and line drawing evokes the illustrated children's story, cartoon or graphic novel. Parallels have been drawn between Opie's images and the work of the Belgian cartoonist Hergé (Georges Prosper Remi) who illustrated and wrote the Tin Tin cartoons, as well as with the style of drawing associated with Japanese manga and anime.¹⁰⁹ In art historical terms the references are back to Pop Art of the 1950s and 1960's such as Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol. Like the works of these artists, the colours and forms of Opie's image draw on graphic design –

¹⁰⁸ Alois Riegl's art historical analysis of the Group Portraiture of Holland introduces the idea of 'attentiveness' in the analysis of group portraiture: the idea that the coherence of the painting is dependent on the presence of a beholder (Olin, 1989; Riegl, 1999 [1902]). One of the differences between the Opie image and the group portraits described by Riegl, is the lack of *internal* 'coherence' between the 'group' members with each in their own separate 'frame' looking outward.

¹⁰⁹ While some work has been done in relation to a sociology of the cartoon or comic (see for example, Barker, 1989; Brienza, 2010; Locke, 2009; McCloud, 1993) it appears to be a comparatively underdeveloped field of sociological concern.

to the colours and forms of packaging and advertising – and the potential for catching the eye and provoking a response.

But the image also draws on the vernacular of signage. Opie has described how he began his work on the human form by looking at standardised representations, including the signs on lavatory doors indicating male and female (Horlock, 2004). Opie similarly aimed to reduce his portraits down to a sign language: “I want it to be as if each person I draw were a multi-national company with a logo” (Opie, quoted in Horlock, 2004, p.82). In effect, then the four portraits are, in the specific historical context of the late 20th Century, the signs or ‘logos’ for young white men: who in terms of the way they are depicted “are not too starry or cocky. They are the boys next door” (Jonathan Jones, 2001, *Guardian*, 28 February, p.18).

As objects with sensuous properties, the portraits draw on the easy familiarity and immediacy of the (faux naïf) colour and form of (a culturally specific) childhood imagery and cartoon and the unthreatening vernacular of the road sign and advertising hoarding. The direct ‘look’ out toward the viewer or beholder is both engaging and engages (it is hard to not ‘look back’). But, by drawing on the visual vocabulary of the multi-national company logo, the image is not only a sign, but also one that also has a potentially globalised legibility (even in cultural contexts in which those portrayed are unlikely to be the ‘boys next door’). Further, there is an argument for saying that use of this vocabulary works not just to generate a response to the ‘aesthetic’ qualities of a visual image, or to the subjects of the image, but interpellates a putative consumer of a ‘brand’.

7.4.3 Reading¹¹⁰ the subject: portrayed and portrayer

This, however, is to assume that the process of ‘looking’ is one-way from image to a passive, receptive viewer. Yet, looking at the image as a series of portraits, the simplicity of form arguably leaves greater scope for the “beholder’s share” (Gombrich, 1980), for interpretation and reading into the

¹¹⁰ Opie regards the spectators of his work as ‘readers’ (Morere, 2005).

image. Like a child's doll, they open up the opportunity for imputing subjectivity, and like all 'signs' there is the potential for the connection with the referent to be arbitrary. As has been argued in relation to Opie's work:

"By preventing subjectivity from manifesting itself in the finished work, Opie pushed the viewer to respond directly...the emphasis is on the active nature of looking." (Horlock, 2004, p.81)

There is, in effect, a duality at play in the portraits - a subjective absence and a quasi-physical presence. This duality is built in to the very means of production. For his portraits Opie takes a digital photograph of a 'real person' (in this case the four band members), then creates drawings from these photographs using a computer drawing programme "abstract[ing] and refining[ing] the image...captur[ing], by an economy of means, the most succinct likeness" (Horlock, 2004, p.107). The drawings can then be reproduced in a number of different formats and sizes – from billboards to mugs – a reproduction of the same, which, as Mitchell (1992) suggests of digital mechanisms of reproduction, brooks no further revelation of detail. Like the work of Lichtenstein and Warhol the means of production combines the handmade and the mechanical (Foster, 2012), but the final product(s), appear to obliterate evidence of the artist-creator. But, unlike Warhol's multiples based on newspaper photographs of, for example Jackie Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe, the Opie portraits betray nothing of their roots in a photographic sitting - of the initial physical presence of the subjects portrayed.

In the context of the work of the American Pop Artists, the vacating of subjectivity from the portrait has been interpreted as, on the one hand, part of a rejection of the bourgeois subjectivity perceived to be encoded in the work and persona of their avant-garde predecessors, abstract expressionism (Danto, 1999; Foster, 2012). On the other hand, at the level of content and form, Pop Art is read as both a celebration and critique of the impact on the self of the doubly constitutive and destructive "inflation of the image" (Foster, 2012), in post second world war western consumer economies (Foster, 2012; Moorhouse, 2007). As Foster (2012) argues, just as "The Pop

[Art] subject is formed by images and circulated through them [so] he or she can also be disarticulated by images and dispersed through them" (Foster, 2012, p.9). Moorhouse, for example, describing the layered production process behind the Warhol multiple silkscreen images of Monroe, sees this as creating an increasing distance between the 'reality' of the actor and her image:

"Warhol began with a photograph, an invented image that masks the real person. The 'mask' was then progressively enhanced through the addition of garish colour, forcing a further disjunction with reality. The final portrait is a metaphor for fame: a fabricated persona, in which the real person has become enmeshed with their 'image'." (Moorhouse, 2007, p.110)

Yet, despite the similar use of multiple means of production, moving progressively further away from the concrete physical presence of the four men who posed for the publicity photo shoots, could the Opie portraits, commissioned for commercial distribution, be said to be similarly critiquing the ostensible dissolution of the subject in the glare of the image? Insofar as the portraits exclude many of the clues by which 'inner essence' or individuality or 'depth' can be 'read' (e.g. more detailed facial modelling to indicate expression, bodily gesture etc.), there is an argument for saying that they expose and rebut the bourgeois "illusion of individual subjectivity" (West, 2004). Arguably, they return to a model of portraiture not as an articulation of an individual 'self', but as artefacts of 'display' (Maynard, 2007) intended historically to express in visible form, power, authority, wealth, rather than inner depth. Here, however, it is not power and authority, but familiarity, boy next-door-ness, that the portraits 'display'. In effect the four members of Blur are constituted not as individuals, but as social types, analogous to those photographed by Sander (see chapter 6)ⁱⁱⁱ, defined by their social roles: guitarist, bassist, singer, drummer. In this way they are, as Horlock (2004), points out, representations of representations.

Paradoxically, however, the limited clues as to 'essence' opens up, as commentators such as Horlock (2004) and Kurjaković (2003) suggest, greater

ⁱⁱⁱ Sander too included 'The Performing Musician' among his photographs.

scope for a beholder's share. In common with the other portraits discussed here, this image can function like a palimpsest, on which a positioned and positioning reader can impute subjectivities to the cartoon faces. The reader is positioned in the sense that the capacity to both 'recognise' these as human faces and as representations of 'real' people, implies a very specific social-historical and technical conjunction. Like the portrait of Gilbert and George, discussed in chapter 6, this positioning is reinforced by the extra-aesthetic 'archive' surrounding the image (discussed below). But it also allows for an actively positioning reader in that, like Ballen's image of Dresie and Casie (figure 6.2) the image's apparent inscrutability and indeterminacy (particularly when separated by time, culture and technology from the 'archive'), opens up a void which a (socially and historically situated) reader can fill.

As discussed in chapter 3 above, indirectly this tension between surface 'display' or external features and imputed subjectivity illustrates what Sousslof (2007) describes as the "functional dialectic" in portraiture between, on the one hand, "the truth claims of an indexical exteriority or resemblance" and, on the other, the claim to represent an interiority or spirituality (p.5). The art historian (and past Director of the National Portrait Gallery) Nairne (2008), in his preface to an exhibition catalogue of Opie's work, similarly draws attention to this 'dialectic', claiming that the artist's work raises questions fundamental to the "500 year old tradition" of portraiture: "the questions span matters of recognition – is it this person? – through to those of expression – what is this person feeling?" (Nairne, 2008, np)

In relation to the four portraits making up the Blur image it could, in fact, be argued that there are three levels of recognition at play: recognition in terms of 'likeness' or resemblance; recognition in the sense used in chapter 6, of the person's portrayed as subjects of moral worth - embracing the second term of Sousslof's and Nairne's 'dialectic' insofar as it opens on to inter-subjective understanding of 'feelings' and 'interiority'; but also, in the sense of 'brand recognition', that is seeing the portraits not as representations of "living or once living people" (Brilliant, 2002 [1991]), but as a 'logo' for a brand (and

potentially a trigger to purchase the product for which the brand is an advertisement).

In terms of the question of resemblance or likeness, despite the minimal detail and modelling each portrait represents a 'different' person: as a number of commentators on Opie's work suggest (Bonet, 2006; Horlock, 2003; Kurjaković, 2003). As the comparison above suggests the portraits do draw out the differences in the physical appearance of each of the band members e.g. the shape, cut and colour of the hair, the shape of face, the dots and lines shaping their eyes, mouths and noses. But whether they are a 'likeness' of the four individuals 'Graham', 'Damon', 'Alex' and 'Dave' is largely contingent on the extra-aesthetic 'archive' – without this they could just be fictional cartoon characters. This prior knowledge means that the 'likeness' can function as both a trigger to, and be read into, the four portraits by a very specific socially, historically, culturally and geographically located 20th Century 'reader' bringing to the portraits a knowledge of who these four men represent (their names), what they look like in 'reality' (from photographs/television programmes/live performances) and why they are together. The market saturation of the image generates recognition in the third sense of 'brand recognition'.

But what of 'recognition' in the sense of being acknowledged as an individual subject of moral worth (Honneth, 2004; Sayer, 2005)? To even ask this question assumes that these cartoons are signs whose referents are 'real' people¹¹², and as such can, on the one hand, draw on the archive of what is 'known', or made known about each individual band member:

"There's Damon, lead singer, big blue eyeballs and remarkable confidence...There's Alex, bass player, 'the mad one', always going on about amoebas in the stratosphere or whatever it is, with a permanent foolish grin. There's Graham, guitar, big brown eyeballs, gets 'panic attacks' in the street for no reason whatsoever. And then there's Dave. And he's always in the pub." (feature on Blur in *Smash Hits* magazine in 1991, quoted in Harris, 2003, p.56)

¹¹² Despite their 'cartoon' style, they are, arguably, no different in this respect from paintings where there is more detailed modelling – a more 'warts and all' depiction.

As suggested, the 'archive' contributes to the construction of individual identities. From Maconie's (1999)'official' account of the band, for example, Graham Coxon emerges from the narrative as anxious and nervous. Alex James is the 'playboy' of the band. Dave Rowntree is older than the others (and tends to be less clearly defined). Damon Albarn is the main songwriter for the band and its leader and spokesperson. Writing on the band, the two music journalists Maconie (1999) and Harris (2003), both draw attention to Albarn's "bullish self-confidence", arrogance and physical attractiveness.

But, outwith the archive, the image, as a group portrait, relies on the capacity of the (socially positioned) viewer to read into the physical exterior. However, as Kurjaković (2003), suggests in relation to Opie's portraits:

"If we try to describe the expression...the one true sign of individuality – and attempt in the process to refer to particular psychological concepts that seem intrinsically coherent, then we will only discover that this very attempt is ambiguous." (p.195)

As suggested above, Andy Warhol's portraits of celebrities have been interpreted as a comment on the nature of celebrity "and the function of the mass media as a means of creating a false sense of accessibility" (West, 2004, p.97). Arguably, the ambiguity of the Blur portraits, coupled with the ubiquity of the image illustrates the generative processes at work to create this "false sense of accessibility". To invert Benjamin, the Blur portraits may create a sense of closeness to the image and imaged, however distant they may be.

But what of the artist, how is his subjectivity referenced in the work? Writing about the pop art portraits of Warhol and Lichtenstein, van Alphen (1997) and Buchloh (1994) describe what they see as the disappearance of the subjectivity of both the portrayed and the portrayer. In relation to Warhol, for example, van Alphen (1997) argues that:

"His painterly performance is systematically absent...his photographic, mechanically produced portraits leave no room for the illusion of the unique self of the portrayer." (p.243)

Using digital technology Opie's portraits similarly efface the presence of the artist insofar as there is no visible trace within the image of the (literal) 'creator's' hand. Coupled with the absent body, commentators have suggested a parallel disengagement by Opie of his "human personality" or "emotions" in the creative process (Morere, 2005). In the face of this apparent self-mortification, the artist's subjectivity is, however recuperated, by, on the one hand, the 'talk' about the creative process (to which Opie himself contributes through interviews), a talk that focuses on the conceptual, rather than physical labour of the artist, and the 'work' Opie invests in "disguising" his presence:

"The reality is that Opie's labours are disguised in much the same way as his models are: subjectivity contained within an impersonal, hard-edged syntax." (Horlock, 2004, p.85)

On the other hand, the artist's presence is marked by the very ubiquity of his work. Recognition is achieved through the specific 'style' of his work, and its repetition and reproduction across media in different contexts. In other words, a 'reader' may not know Opie's *name* but may nonetheless recognise an Opie: "work known, artist unknown", in the words of one journalist (Tom Lubbock, Independent 25 Sept 2001). In the context of prints and engravings, Fyfe (1988) argues that reproduction "is a medium through which authorship is produced" (p.84). Arguably, the use of reproductive technologies to produce and subsequently reproduce either the same image or different images in multiple formats for different contexts works to constitute Opie's ostensible 'uniqueness'. Arguably, in this way the work effectively serves as a logo for Julian Opie.¹¹³

7.5 The Blur narrative: from Britpop to *Best of*

As suggested above, the Blur myth or narrative, together with the specific social-historical moment of which the band was a part provides the 'archive' on which the meaning attributed to the image and the imaged draws.

¹¹³ Opie has also produced a self-portrait in the style of his Blur portraits.

By the time the *The best of* album, for which the image was commissioned, was released, Blur had been in existence with the 2000 line up of members since 1988. They produced six albums (excluding the '*The best of*') over the 10 years 1990 – 2000. A seventh album was released in 2003.¹¹⁴

Journalistic accounts of the group, including their *Official History*, (Maconie, 1999) and Harris's (2003) analysis of the wider phenomenon known as 'Britpop'¹¹⁵, set out and construct the Blur narrative: the band's creation myth, its travails, and (to the time of the *The best of* album), resolution and maturation.

In terms of the band's emergence, two features had particular salience for their future direction. First, their origins in the south and South-east of England and, second an art school connection, specifically Goldsmith's College in London, where three of the band members met.

As Frith and Horne (1987) argue, British art colleges have provided fertile environments for British pop musicians: providing the romantic model of creative individuality that encourages freedom and experimentation that "can be translated into the terms of popular culture" (p.58).

The south of England and art school connections are also relevant to the emergence what came to be defined as 'Britpop', a short-lived "cultural moment" (Harris, 2003) between 1994 –1998 of which Blur was a central part.

As defined by Harris (2003), Britpop comprised two strands. First, it was a reference back to the British musical heritage of the 1960's and bands such as

¹¹⁴ A sociological or musicological analysis of the albums themselves is outwith the scope of the thesis.

¹¹⁵ Both sources are not just accounts of, but also constitutive of the Blur myth, and of Britpop. As Frith, however, argues in respect of theories of pop music more generally, "[these] developed out of day-to-day practices of pop itself, out of people's need to bring some sort of order and justification to the continuing processes of musical evaluation, choice and commitment...Perhaps we should call the results low theory – confused, inconsistent, full of hyperbole and silence, but still theory" (Frith, 1987, quoted in Frith and Horne, 1987, p.21).

the Beatles, the Kinks and the Who and a concern for “quintessentially British experiences” (Harris, 2003, p.xv).¹¹⁶

Second, Britpop was built on commercial success. Although it had its early roots in the musical subcultures of indie and punk music, by the time the term became public currency in the mid 1990’s it was already, according to Harris (2003), moving away from its founding principles, seduced by popularity and “fetishisation of chart positions, platinum discs and huge crowds” (p.367).

In Harris’s analysis, Britpop was both running in parallel with, and co-opted into, a corresponding political trajectory. It initially emerged from a political context of Conservative party government from 1979 until the election of the ‘New’ Labour government in May 1997. Although the (pop) music industry, including Blur, were courted by New Labour, the Britpop era, according to Harris (2003) was drawing to a close, just as the newly elected government set about a “Britpop-inspired project called ‘the rebranding of Britain’” (Harris, 2003, p.xx) – to become, in the media inspired epithet, ‘cool Britannia’.

The term ‘Britpop’ itself was coined in 1993¹¹⁷, by which time Blur had released a number of singles and two albums. It was, however, the release of the band’s third album *Parklife* in 1994 which was seen as both Britpop’s and Blur’s “defining moment” (Maconie, 1999). The album received “universal acclaim” (Maconie, 1999), debuting at number 1 in the UK album charts, and staying in the charts for 90 weeks.¹¹⁸ With its cockney narration on the title track, and its cover sleeve of greyhound racing it was felt to express a

¹¹⁶ Although referred to as *Britpop*, it was a largely English, and more specifically London/South-East England construct, built primarily around London based bands. Oasis, a band from Manchester who also emerged in this period and who were set up in competition with Blur were, as Harris, suggests “gatecrashers” to the party.

¹¹⁷ Both Maconie and Harris suggest that the term was first used in *Select* magazine in an article calling for a “new British perspective in pop culture” (Maconie, 1999, p.181). Although the social and political processes at play can not be explored here, it is perhaps not entirely coincidental that the term ‘Young British Artists’ was coined around the same time in relation to a group of artists, contemporary in age to the Britpop bands and similarly predominantly London/metropolitan based (see for example, Corris, 1992).

¹¹⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parklife> (accessed 5 January 2014)

specifically English (sic) and proletarian identity, and one which would, according to Maconie, set Britpop's dominant style. The album was seen as ushering in a "birds, booze and football culture" (Maconie, 1999 p.181), an identity actively adopted by Albarn. 1994 also saw the emergence of the Manchester based band Oasis, a group who actively identified themselves with both (Northern) working class and 'lad' culture.

Relations between Blur and Oasis, initially marked by "jokey sparring" (Maconie, 1999) turned increasingly sour. This growing hostility was accounted for not in terms of musical differences but class and regional differences. For the press it was a clash between art school, clean cut middle class, southern 'boys', and hard-drinking working class, northern 'lads'. The 'battle' reached its high point when both bands released singles on the same day in August 1995.

Blur's fifth album *The Great Escape* was launched in September 1995, shortly followed by the release of the Oasis album *What's the Story (Morning Glory)*, a hugely successful album that also launched a media backlash against Blur. This again was couched in terms of Oasis as "rude and robust northern warriors keeping alive the torch of rock's great spirit, while Blur were art-school dilettantes" (Maconie, 1999, p.223).

In February 1997 Blur launched their sixth album, *Blur*. Reflecting what Harris (2003) describes as Coxon and Albarn's desire to return the band to its art school roots, it represented "Britpop's quintessential metropolitan lads perform[ing] the most wilful handbrake turn..." (Maconie, 1999, p.239). This about turn was mirrored in Albarn's re-invention of his own identity:

"Though he had once been prone to lapsing into mewling faux-cockney and launching rapid verbal tirades, he now spoke in a deep, hushed timbre, and issued his words at half his previous rate." (Harris, 2003, p.322)

It was thus after the brief maelstrom that was the emergence and demise of 'Britpop', three-years after the band's own musical 'handbrake turn', and three-years after the election of a new government which had actively

courted the music industry, that *Blur: The best of* album, for which the four portraits were produced, was released. According to the Wikipedia entry on the band, the record debuted at number 3 in the UK album charts.¹¹⁹ However, neither Maconie nor Harris make any reference to this record. Blur's official website provides no information on the album, although Opie's artwork was included in the *Blur 21* exhibition of images and photographs of the band, held in London in 2012. Only the Wikipedia entry for the band (routed directly from the Blur website) suggests something of the context behind its release. An interview in a music magazine cites them as saying that this was "the first record we have seen as product". According to the Wikipedia entry, "the tracklisting and release dates were determined on the basis of market research and focus groups conducted by Blur's record label, EMI".¹²⁰

In some respects this framing of the album suggests its own 'inauthenticity' both in terms of the band's musical rejection, by this time, of its 'pop' back catalogue, and a return to its 'indie' (and ostensibly more 'authentic') musical roots, but also because it is presented as market-driven rather than emergent from some sort of autonomous 'creative' process. This raises the question why this image for this product at this time? And what are the implications for its consecration as an autonomous work of art?

7.6 Between art and commerce: Blurred boundaries

7.6.1 The Blur cover art : "Art manufactured for a mass audience"?

"I was buying computer games in Virgin Megastore when my gallery called to ask if I would let a design company use my portrait style to pitch for the next Blur album cover. I said 'sure' and we got the job. It was a great period for me, seeing the CDs in shops, coming out of Screen on the Green and seeing my portraits going by on a bus...they then got sold to the National Portrait Gallery which was a lovely ending." (Julian Opie interview, 2002, Independent on Sunday, 31 March, p.7)

¹¹⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blur_%28band%29 (accessed 3 January 2014).

¹²⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blur_%28band%29 (accessed 3 January 2014).

Before the commission for the *best of* CD cover, Opie had previously designed a cover for the group St Etienne. His portraits had also been published in the magazine *Sleazenation* – these caught the eye of a design group commissioned by EMI to suggest ideas for the cover design of the *best of* album. As described above, he began by taking photographs of the band members, then:

“Abstracted and refined the image in his now trademark style, and captured, by an economy of means, the most succinct likeness. The ‘generic icons’ could translate into multiple formats and scales...it became Opie’s most far-reaching project.” (Horlock, 2004, p.107)

It has not been possible to identify material describing the ‘brief’ given to Opie for the Blur cover, nor commentary on the interaction between the artist and band members in the course of producing the image.

As has been intimated throughout, this particular image occupies an ambiguous, or hybrid position: it is a group of individual portraits commissioned from an established ‘artist’ as a ‘unique’ work of art (the/an ‘original’ set of which was purchased for the National Portrait Gallery in London); but it is also the design for a record cover made using digital means of production and intended to have saturation distribution in different media for the purposes of advertising a product for ‘mass’ consumption. Understanding how the image works as a group portrait cannot therefore be understood in isolation from its overtly commercial function as a record cover and marketing tool.

While it is not possible here to undertake a sociology of record cover design, the work of Frith and Horne (1987), Walker (1987), Jones and Sorger (1999) and Inglis (2001), suggests that, from their initial function as protective packaging for the wax cylinders and flat disks of early pre-recorded music, record cover design emerged as a key site for the constitution of band/brand identity and, in its role as ‘silent salesman’, a means for ‘hailing’ a putative consumer. Further, through designers ‘plundering’ ‘fine art’ images or, as in the case of the *best of* cover, commissioning ‘artists’ to design ‘original’

works, record covers have the potential to effectively explode and expose the artificial distinction between ‘fine art’ and ‘graphic design’. First, images such as the *best of* cover blur the assumed (but socially constructed) line between images produced from an individual creative imagination, intended to solve a personal set of problems, and those intended for mass consumption drawing on the designer’s creativity to solve someone else’s problems (Lewis, 2003). Effectively, the Blur album cover is both an expression of Opie’s individual artistic ‘difference’ or ‘unique’ vision, and the “singular visual image” which enables consumers to distinguish one product, or in this case, record/group, from another (Frith and Horne, 1987; Jones and Sorger, 1999), and to distinguish themselves from other consumers through the choices made. Second, record cover design throws together (the equally socially constituted distinction between) ‘high’ art and ‘pop’ culture. Opie is just one in a line of artists commissioned to design record covers. Frith and Horne (1987), for example, note that in the 1960s it was ex-UK art school musicians who gave the first ‘High’ Pop art artists, such as Richard Hamilton, Peter Blake and Andy Warhol, the opportunity to design record covers.¹²¹ This made the artists ‘bestsellers’ while the images they made became part of pop culture. Arguably, the commissioned covers were a form of “art manufactured for a mass audience” (Richard Hamilton quoted in Frith and Horne, 1987, p.103).

The Blur album cover illustrates how the record cover can function as something that extends beyond protective packaging to become a visual medium in its own right for positioning a band/brand, the music and the consumer.

As discussed in earlier chapters, for images in ‘series’ (another form of ‘multiple’) consideration should be given to the cumulative effects as well as the operation of individual images within the series. In this context, what a rapid review of the group’s record covers prior to *The best of* album

¹²¹ Reflecting the inter and intra connections between what Frith and Horne (1987), following George Melly, call high pop (art) and low pop (mass produced), both Blake and Hamilton were commissioned through their agent Robert Fraser, who was a gallery owner and also socially connected to pop musicians such as Mike Jagger of the Rolling Stones.

underlines is the distinctiveness of this image across their 'oeuvre'. For the previous albums the design company Stylorouge (<http://www.stylorouge.co.uk/>) had used stock images. Part of an oil painting by band member Graham Coxon was used for the cover of the 1999 album '13'.^{122,123} Most conspicuously, however, as described above, is the conscious adoption (by Damon Albarn) of a 'laddish' identity for the release of the *Parklife* album, and the commissioned cover photograph of greyhound racing – a sport traditionally associated with the working class.

The Blur *best of* cover was therefore significantly different in concept. It was the first of the band's albums to use a commissioned artist¹²⁴ and visually to feature portraits of the four band members on the front cover itself. This was at a time when their physical identities were already familiar (through photographs, concerts, pop videos and television appearances).

Jones and Sorger (1999) suggest that portraiture or 'face shots' are the dominant form of album cover design across musical genres; underlining the 'atypicality' of Blur's earlier album covers. The particular structural form of the *best of* cover with the individual band members separated as if on different 'screens' or in different spaces, also has its antecedents. In particular the cover of the group Queen's *Hot Space* album released in 1982 which features each of the individual band members in their own square, with their faces traced out in different colour inks set against a different bright primary colour background (see figure 7.4).¹²⁵

¹²² There is scope, outwith the confines of the thesis, for a more detailed analysis of the Blur record covers, and particularly of the relationship between the covers and the band's shifting (and constructed/reconstructed/deconstructed) musical and professional 'identity' (Inglis, 2001). More detailed analysis would also need to consider the titles and the relationship between text and image, including consideration of the covers for their singles, a number of which caused a degree of controversy.

¹²³ Information on the record covers has again drawn from 'low' sources, including Wikipedia and the fan's website www.vblurpage.com (accessed 10 July 2015).

¹²⁴ The graffiti artist Banksy was commissioned to design the cover of the 2003 album *Think Tank*.

¹²⁵ The Beatles last album *Let it Be* (1970) and the Who's 1981 album *Face Dances*, also use this grid format.



Figure 7.4
[Artist not known]
Cover art for the Queen album *Hot Space*
1982

Opie was therefore drawing on a ‘standard’ cover model of ‘portraits’ of individual band members located in separate spaces in a grid.¹²⁶ This format, to use a term adopted by Inglis (2001) (drawing on Barthes), is the most ‘readerly’ of the Blur album covers. While the designs of their earlier covers were more ‘writerly’, insofar as their indeterminacy allowed the ‘reader’/consumer greater scope for interpretation, this cover, and particularly its use of portraiture, leaves little scope for “the reader’s involvement in the negotiation of meaning(s)” (Inglis, 2001, p.94); the cover, as material object, “achieves closure”, even as it leaves open, at the level of the imaged individual, scope for the beholder’s share in reading in subjectivity.

As an image the Blur record cover emerges from a specific socio-historical, cultural and economic (and political) moment. As packaging for a ‘product’, the cartoon-like style, primary colours and limited modelling, can be read because of this knowledge, but the subsequent marketing of the ‘product’ and the ubiquity of the image in all its different formats, both reinforces and

¹²⁶ It may also be salient to note that, by his own admission, Opie finds it difficult to draw couples. The grid format may therefore be an ‘individual solution’ for working around this.

generates this 'product recognition', not just of the band, but the individuals represented; their 'unique' (physical) identities. The image's form and its *raison d'être* is therefore its capacity for multiple reproduction, multiple distribution and multiple reception/recognition.

The album itself comprises a compilation of music from the Blur's 'Britpop' days. As noted above, by the time it was released the band had distanced itself from this style of music and regarded this album solely as 'product' (and therefore 'inauthentic'). To shift 'product' may require 'packaging' that emphasises surface over depth, artifice over 'authenticity'. This may account for the visually 'readerly' form over the 'writerly' (Inglis, 2001). As Inglis argues, the removal of ambiguity is associated with the commercial imperative to sell product:

"There is thus a commercial imperative to diminish the potential consumer's scope for uncertainty at the point of transaction by emphasizing as clearly as possible the nature of the commodity on sale. For the sale of albums, the easiest ways to accomplish this are to frankly present the name of the performers, their likeness (usually a photograph), and the title of the LP." (2001, p.94)

Another reading could suggest that the use of cartoon-like form may (inadvertently) function to signal the artifice: to expose the simulacrum, to reveal the band as a "highly mediated version of reality produced for public consumption" (Richardson, 2005, p.5), or as a "logo for a multinational company". Damon Albarn's later work, in association with the cartoonist Jamie Hewlett, to create the virtual band *Gorillaz*, even more self-consciously uses the artifice of animation to "creat[e] a kind of authorial signature while simultaneously bringing into sight the artifice that is his or her creation" (Richardson, 2005, p.7). But while potentially a subversive or parodic move, the use of artifice to expose artifice, nonetheless works to meet the commercial imperative. As Frith and Horne (1987), comment, the problem of creativity (musical and/or visual) under market conditions is that "capitalist culture recuperates everything" (p.111).

But, to turn away from its function as a record cover, to its source as an image commissioned from an 'artist', the parallel question it raises is

whether it is also or still a (semi-autonomous) work of art, multiply produced, or are claims to its being art negated by being produced precisely for multiple production and mass consumption? Further, how might this positioning, and the reading of the four portraits (as image and imaged), be shaped by and shift beyond the specific social-historical moment? To begin to explore this the next section shifts the focus from the 'pop' context to the 'art' context.

7.6.2 Julian Opie: between art and commerce

As noted above, by the time Opie was commissioned to produce the four portraits he was already an established artist. Graduating in 1982, he was one of the dense network of artists emerging from, or connected to, Goldsmith's College, London, the breeding ground for a later generation of young British artists such as Damien Hirst (Grenfell and Hardy, 2003), and also, at a later date, where three of the Blur members met. Opie was also 'established' in the sense of having achieved a degree of art world recognition. In 1997 he was offered, but turned down the opportunity to be nominated for the prestigious Turner Prize shortlist.¹²⁷

Initially beginning with more sculptural work (made from industrial materials), Opie subsequently moved on to images of the human form, producing very simplified images, starting from standardised representations such as the signs for male and female on toilet doors. (Positive) commentators see Opie's work as being influenced by British and Dutch painted portraits of the 17th and 18th Century, the work of the 19th century Japanese artist Hiroshige, and, from the 20th Century, Duchamp, Minimalism, Pop art (specifically Warhol), the illustrator Hergé, and his Goldsmith's teachers, the artists Michael Craig-Martin (for whom Opie worked as an assistant) and Patrick Caulfield. Each is variously seen as influencing Opie's use of the everyday and familiar in terms of subject matter

¹²⁷ According to commentaries and media reports this was on the grounds that Opie felt the prize had become a "frivolous publicity stunt" (see, for example, <http://www.thejackdaw.co.uk/?p=130> (accessed 10 July 2015); Charles Darwent, 'Visual art – Growing up as an infantalist artist', *Independent on Sunday*, 11 February 2001, p.5). It has not been possible to verify this.

and a visual language drawing on the clear lines, flat colour and schematic representation characteristic of graphic design (Bonet, 2006; Horlock, 2004).

According to Horlock, Opie sees his work as being primarily about 'looking', about creating a language to reveal how we 'read' the world. But his "interest lies not in 'reality' but in how reality is represented to us" (Horlock, 2004, p.7). With a nod to Baudrillard, for Horlock:

"Opie has always been making representations of representations; paintings of paintings, models of models, signs...His art reflects the artifice that frames contemporary experience." (2004, p.7)

In addition to drawing on the visual codes and conventions of commercial art, Opie also shares with Pop artists such as Andy Warhol, the use of 'factory'-like methods of production, producing series of works, (or one work reproduced in multiple media or formats) involving multiple stages of production and multiple contributors. In this respect Opie sees himself as a manipulator, constructor or "puppeteer" rather than an inventor or moulder (Terry Grimley, Birmingham Post, 21 October 2001; Lewis, 2003; Morere, 2005). Building on digital photographs, his images of bodies and portraits are developed on a computer, but do not become a work until the final stage of production, a process that may involve a range of other techniques and technicians:

"Once I have chosen the photo I like best I trace it in Adobe Illustrator on my Apple Mac using the pen, not a mouse. At a certain point I get rid of the photo and fiddle with the drawing for a week or so and then e-mail it to a printer who sends me back a string of colour tests. Once I like the colours they print it and bike it to someone else who mounts it on a wooden frame." (Julian Opie interview in the Independent on Sunday, 31 March 2002, p.7)

Not only are the images technically 'co-produced', but by using digital media, the output is not a singular, 'unique' image, but rather, according to Horlock (2004), "a series of options stored on computer files that can be called up if and when required, tailored to relate to any space" (p.87).

The factory or industrial like processes has its parallel in Opie's play with and on the link between art and commerce. This was made explicit in the production of a mail order type trade catalogue to accompany an exhibition at the Lisson Grove gallery in 2001 (at which the four Blur portraits were shown). By using the model of a trade paper, including drawings and prices for the prints exhibited, Opie felt he was able to use it both to display the range of his work and "systematise the prices" while, at the same time, reinforce his role as the artist and creator:

"This is a trade catalogue because I am trading, and it's a catalogue because I am an artist, and it's got my work in it because I am the person making the exhibition...[and] a trade catalogue without prices in it is just not right. So I put the prices in, and it felt exciting and a bit risky. It's reality, though. It's in people's heads when they go to commercial galleries that the work is for sale...There was also a definite desire on my part to systematise the prices...The catalogue obviously looks like its fictional but it is actually real, and that's how a lot of my work functions. A play between revealing the falseness and falsifying the realness." (Opie, quoted in Horlock, 2004, pp.90-91)

Despite this apparent rebuttal and exposure of the romantic notion of the creative artist untainted by commercial concerns (Frith and Horne, 1987), Opie, in fact reinforces it, arguing that the work is created for itself, driven by an artistic purpose, and the fact that it can also function as design is peripheral to his concerns (Lewis, 2003).

The artist's claim to his own unique-ness (and that of those he portrays), has its own repeat among commentators supportive of his work, who frame both his working practices and his work as a play between: the universal and the particular; between "objective observation and technology...perfected by the artist's own hand and eye" (Horlock, 2004, p.85); between the impersonality of digital media and a sense of Opie's self (Morere, 2005); between the distinguishing characteristics of each of the people portrayed and a style "which turns them practically into logos" (Bonet, 2006).

But this play between unique creation, schematic representation and mass production techniques opens up the scope for the artist to lose control of his

own 'products'. While copying artworks, or producing works 'in the style of' is not specific to digital technology (as discussed earlier), it widens the potential for others to use the same technology to, as in this case, create their own 'Opies'. At least one website, for example, has been found which includes instructions on how to create an Opie-style portrait.¹²⁸ Opie has, however, been critical of others using Opie-type images. In 2006, for example, he criticised a Channel 4 chat show for creating Opie-style images for each of the guests.¹²⁹ In a letter to the Sunday Times in 2009 the Director of the Lisson Gallery (Opie's gallery) was also moved to:

"...Correct any possible misunderstanding that Julian Opie was involved or approved the pastiche of his iconic Blur album cover that appeared on your Culture cover last week. He didn't. To see his original work click on..."
Greg Hilty, 2009, Director of the Lisson Gallery (Letter to the Sunday Times, 29 November, np)

In what could be interpreted as an attempt to extend (and maintain some control over) the opportunities for marketing his merchandise, Opie opened his own online shop through which images can be purchased.¹³⁰ An article in the South China Morning Post, published on the occasion of an exhibition of Opie's work in Hong Kong 2009, describes this move as helping to break down the boundaries between high art and commercial art. Opie, however, argues, that this was motivated to enhance the longevity of his otherwise transient multiples:

"A lot my multiple works, such as my bookmarks and posters disappear after gallery shows have finished, so it makes sense to have my own outlet. Opening the shop was mainly motivated by the frustration at the energy spent in creating these things being lost." (Julian Opie, 2009, quoted in the South China Morning Post, 8 May, np)

¹²⁸ http://www.designandtech.com/fotoshop/tutorials/julianopie/julian_opie_tutorial.htm (accessed 5 March 2014).

¹²⁹ When invited by the same channel to participate in a programme on self-portraiture he accepted the offer, seeing it as a chance for 'put[ting] things right. For the programme he was filmed making a self-portrait (Interview in Julian Opie, Twenty Six Portraits, Alan Cristea Gallery (2006) (<http://www.julianopie.com/#/text/catalogue/368>; accessed 5 march 2014)

¹³⁰ <http://www.julianopieshop.com/index.php> (accessed 14 June 2015).

7.6.3 The artist in the field: 'the painter of our modern life' or 'a slickly ironic Gainsborough'?

"Opie does really seem to us the painter of our modern life, a life in which the real and the virtual, the artificial and the authentic, feelings and logos are all mixed. As the painter, that in days to come, we will most identify with our time." (Bonet, 2006)¹³¹

"This is not pop. This is the culture of the contemporary British middle class, to whom Opie has appointed himself a slickly ironic Gainsborough. The very thing about his portraits that makes them jokey, the assimilation of everyone to the same conventions – also establishes group identity...in Gainsborough's case, those of the 18th Century gentry, in Opie's – well, the people who buy the Best of Blur...Opie's exhibition is contemporary art at its worst, over-friendly with its knowing audience and flattering to nationalist cultural delusions." (Jonathan Jones, 2001, Guardian, 28 February, p.18)

Critical appreciation of Opie's work suggests he (and his output) occupies an ambiguous position between high and popular art, between institutional consecration and minor or transient status. Introductions to his exhibitions or monographs of his works by art historians such as Horlock (2004), Kurjaković (2003) and Nairne (2008) tend to be largely positive, locating Opie, as noted above, within a lineage extending back historically to encompass 17th and 18th century portraiture, 20th century avant-garde art and cartoon as well as cross-culturally to Japanese graphic.

Wider media commentaries on his work (often emerging at times when Opie has a new exhibition), however, shift, (even within the same article) between the overtly critical, cautiously positive and the ambivalent. Examples from the print media at the time of Opie's 2001 Lisson Grove exhibition include the review by Guardian arts journalist, Jonathan Jones, who as the quote above suggests, was vociferous in his criticism of Opie's work. Jones in particular criticises what he regards as the reductionist and "smugly celebratory" nature of Opie's portraits, and their populist and middle class content (and, by extension, audience). Other commentators suggest a more

¹³¹ In using this expression Bonet is making a reference to Baudelaire's essay on the 19th Century 'painter of modern life', Constantin Guy. Ironically, Baudelaire's essay (1995 [1863]), and in particular his account of modernity, has stood the test of time better than the artist and his work.

measured appreciation of his work, using terms like ‘simplicity’, ‘economy of means’, ‘punch[ing] above their weight emotionally’. A common theme is to draw attention to effects of the series or the multiple, the whole over the part:

“As bland and banal as the work is, in situ it impresses, the consistently dumbed-down aesthetic creating an atmosphere of unreality. Divided and separated, however, one wonders how powerful these pieces remain.” (Nick Hackworth, 2001, *The Evening Standard*, 23 February, p.60)

As the quote from Hackworth suggests, the praise often comes accompanied by a ‘but’. There is a reluctance to wholly consecrate Opie’s work but also a hesitancy about suggesting he is (in terms of the field) an imposter:

“Wander around the Lisson Gallery for long enough – about three minutes, by rough reckoning – and you wonder whether the whole thing isn’t a particularly audacious piss-take...[But] Opie may be mocking, but it also seems troublingly possible that he may be doing something else; namely embracing the realities of the visual world in which we live and trying to make something lyrical out of them.” (Charles Darwent, 2001, *Independent on Sunday*, 11 February, p.5)

Part of this ambivalence to Opie’s work also seems to stem from his ostensible commercialism: both in terms of the nature of the images themselves, and the way they are presented in the exhibitions – the shop window displays and accompanying mail-order type catalogues. In the face of the “hot potato of commerciality” (Hackworth, 2001), commentators seem uncertain whether to view this as a Warholesque gesture of subversion, or to take it at face value, with implications for both authenticity and the art market equivalent of value for money:

“The overt commercialism of Opie’s aesthetic is matched by his prices...[Opie’s] work uses its own brazen commercialism to raise all sorts of edgy questions about the commercialism in art in general. The fact that you can order his pieces off the peg seems especially scandalous: £35,000 quid and its not even couture! Raising questions about the value of authenticity in an age of mechanical reproduction is not new – Warhol was asking them 40 years ago – but Opie’s work takes the tendency to dangerous extremes. His works are blatantly phony: paintings on canvas that are actually designed on a computer, downloaded to a commercial printers and paint-jetted mechanically onto acrylic.” (Charles Darwent, 2001, *Independent on Sunday*, 11 February, p.5)

"...That's the problem with a market that prizes the rare or unique – it can so easily be thwarted by an artist who doesn't hold back. Once Opie has fixed on his visual symbol, he will reproduce it in every conceivable format or size...Opie's blithe attitude to what he sells is both humorous and winningly frank...After all, he could hardly pretend to be producing complex masterpieces, each carefully nuanced by hand." (Laura Cumming, 2001, The Observer, 11 February, p.12)

7.6.4 Blur in the Gallery

As testimony to its success as 'packaging' for a commercial product, in 2001 the *best of* cover image won a Music Week Creative and Design Awards Best Illustration award. Fellow artist Gavin Turk, interviewed in 2009 for an article on record cover design also included the Opie image as one the 10 best album covers. Noting it as a move, by Opie, into "product", Turk makes the case for its qualities as a record cover on the basis of its likeability, which acted as an incentive to purchase the album, and its functionality as a cover design for a 'greatest hits' album:

"I remember buying this album partly because I liked the cover. Julian did capture a moment with his reductivist portraits, and here it's an interesting move into product. It fits with the idea of a band's greatest hits, so it was the right choice of artist for this kind of album cover." (Gavin Turk, 2009, interviewed for the Observer Music Magazine, 19 April, np)

As an 'artwork', however, it has generated more mixed feelings. For Jonathan Jones, writing in the Guardian, for example:

"Almost anything in the National Portrait Gallery is irritating, but this [The Blur image] is particularly so because Opie's done such a smoothed out, contemporary stylish painting, without any real originality or feeling or emotions. It's not anything that couldn't be done on a computer. I know it invites comparison with Warhol and Richter, but with both of those there are great painterly touches and emotions, but not with Opie. And Blur themselves are embarrassing subject matter. They're the quintessence of Brit Pop and what was supposedly hot in our culture in the 90s. Now they're just deeply unfashionable." (Jonathan Jones, 2005, Guardian, 19 August, np)

Jones' critique reflects the now familiar flip flop between the image and the imaged: the work of art is inauthentic (lacking in 'aura'?) because it is too slick/commercial and lacking in 'emotions', unlike that of other

contemporary portraitists; and the imaged insufficiently significant/passé/too low-brow to be worthy of 'art'.

This use of 'authenticity' (or rather its lack) as an evaluative criteria is mirrored in the response of some of the Trustees of the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) in London when, in 2001, the Gallery was offered a set of the Blur portraits. As discussed in chapter 3 above, historically, the NPG has been less concerned with the 'aesthetic' qualities of the images included in its collection, than with the 'worthiness' of those imaged, and the extent to which the image is an 'authentic' likeness. Media reports at the time suggest that some of the NPG trustees proved unwilling purchasers of the four portraits on the grounds that the band (i.e. the imaged) were not sufficiently famous and might not pass the test of time.¹³²

A search of the NPG website does reveal a number of images of pop musicians in its catalogue which suggests that the gallery is not opposed, in principle, to including representatives of 'pop' culture within its collections. The rejection of this image may therefore suggest a qualitative judgement on the band and the music they produced and its presumed transitory (inauthentic?) nature. The then Director of the Gallery, Charles Saumarez Smith, even alludes to this, referring to "an unexpectedly sophisticated discussion on their musical merits and their place in the nineties pop hierarchy". For Saumarez Smith "it is controvertible that BritArt and Britpop have a place in history" (quoted by Nigel Reynolds, 2001, *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 September, p7). The subsequent acquisition of the image appears to be due to Director's negotiations with Opie's commercial gallery¹³³

¹³² This does though perhaps beg the question in relation to portraits in general, and to displays in portrait galleries in particular, how many of those portrayed are recognizable outwith their specific space and time? Is there a point when the content or documentary function of the portrait – the value of the imaged – is superseded by the 'aesthetic' /sensuous properties of the object – the value of the image?

¹³³ This process raises a number of questions, which cannot be fully explored here, about the power relations at play in the acquisition of artworks for public galleries. In relation to National Portrait Galleries this would need to take into account not just the status accorded to the artist, but also to the subject, in other words who is of sufficient cultural 'worth' to be represented within a national collection.

and the National Art Collection Fund, which purchased the image on behalf of the NPG at half price (£12,000 for all four portraits).

The Blur portraits were obtained and shown at the same time as self-portraits by the 'young British artists' Tracey Emin and Sarah Lucas. For Terence Pepper, the curator of photography at the Gallery the images were both "part of a drive to modernise the collection" as well as a draw for the public:

"Blur and Tracey Emin are two of the biggest names in modern culture, they are sure to attract more people to the gallery...they are in the entrance and will be the first pictures people see when they come to the gallery. We have given them pride of place." (Terence Pepper, 2001, quoted in the Daily Mail, 6 September, p.27).

Although obtained at a time when the gallery was actively seeking to expand its collection of contemporary art, throughout the NPG debate it is the evaluation of the imaged (their cultural significance and longevity versus their transient popularity) that takes precedence over the evaluation of the image. Ironically, however, as the comment by Terence Pepper suggests, it is the band's very popularity that is anticipated to achieve the gallery equivalent of 'bums on seats'. As a work of 'art' it is a journalist who perhaps damns it with faint praise when he comments that, "Artistically Blur are less eye catching than the self-portraits by the two BritArtists 'Mad Tracey of Margate' Emin and Sarah Lucas." (Nigel Reynolds, 2001, The Daily Telegraph, 6 September, p.7).

7.7 Conclusion: From an aura to a blur?

"When the age of mechanical reproduction separated art from its basis in cult, the semblance of its autonomy disappeared forever." (Benjamin, 1999a [1936], p.220)

"Damon, Graham, Alex and Dave as they might have been drawn by Hergé. These images came in every size, from CD to full-scale hoarding. Nor was there any idea of a limited edition, based on some priceless original. If you bought the album, it could even be argued that you own a quartet of Opie portraits." (Laura Cumming, 2001, The Observer, 11 February, p.12)

"...Pop [Art] shows us how, in a consumerist economy, objects and images tend to become serial and simulacral, and how commodities tend to operate like signs and vice versa." (Foster, 2012, p.13)

With the introduction of mechanical (as opposed to manual) means of reproduction Benjamin foresaw a "shattering" of the tradition, the residuum, of 'ritual' or 'cult', associated with the hand-made unique or singular art object physically presenting its history for the penetrating gaze and "unarmed eye" of the knowing viewer. Mechanical reproduction replaces the physically present object and its visible signs of uniqueness (the hand of the artist and the object's passage through time), with a plurality of images of the object, taking it outwith the "place where it happens to be" to meet the beholder(s) "half-way". By erasing the presence over, and in, time and space of both the artist and the art object, mechanical reproduction simultaneously voids the object of its authority and its ineffable 'aura'. With the 'withering' away of aura art's (claims to) autonomy, its ostensible separation from social life, disappear "forever". This change in the very nature of art consequent upon mechanical reproduction, is for Benjamin, coincident upon a shift in perception, the perception not of the individual (bourgeois) connoisseur but of the 'masses' who privilege closeness over uniqueness, who are "ardent" in their desire "to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction" (Benjamin, 1999a [1936] p.217). Mechanically produced art forms, such as film enable everyone to be an 'expert', their views shaped and shared as part of a communal experience of viewing. And this viewing is not contemplative, but distracted, a series of 'shocks', which, for Benjamin, open up the potential for film to be a force for political change, albeit one constrained by the film industry's promotion of "illusion promoting spectacles and dubious speculations" (Benjamin, 1999a [1936], p.226).

Running in parallel, however, is Benjamin's ambivalent attitude toward the implications of the diminution of 'aura' from the imaged, from the subject represented in mechanically produced work. While the removal of the human face from the work is a further reflection of the loosening hold of cult and ritual associated with traditional representations, at the same time it

risks diminishing the capacity for intersubjective recognition – the capacity of the imaged to “return the gaze”.

The introduction of digital technologies of production, reproduction, distribution, reception and (re) production in the late 20th and early 21st century open up the potential for accelerating these shifts in perception, in the nature of ‘art’ and its grounds for authority and autonomy, including the processes and constituencies of validation and evaluation.

The analysis of the digitally produced ‘group portrait’ of the four members of the band Blur, an ‘art’ object intended for ‘mass’ consumption as advertisement and record cover, has therefore provided an opportunity to explore some of the implications of Benjamin’s arguments.

Analysis of the image as sensuous object, as a representation of and by living individuals, and as an object circulating in the field of cultural production, revealed its hybridity. In some respects it follows in the tradition of early portraiture: a portrait commissioned not (ostensibly) as an expression of ‘essence’ but as an artefact of display (Maynard, 2007). In this case the patron is not monarchical or aristocratic but a culture industry corporation. In both cases the portraits are fabricated self-images, but what the Opie portraits render visible is not the political authority of a ruler but the surface familiarity of the celebrity.

Based on a digital photograph, re-worked using a computer software programme with the aim of being reproducible in a range of different formats, multiplicity and ubiquity are both integral to the production process and embedded in the image’s very *raison d’être*. Further, the image draws on the readerly (Inglis, 2001) style of the modern cartoon (such as the work of Hergé, in the quote from Cummings (2001) above). Yet, at the same time, claims (and counterclaims) are made for its authority and authenticity as an artwork, and ‘originals’ as put on show within the sacred spaces of the Gallery. Parallel claims and counterclaims are similarly made for the ‘authenticity’ of the imaged – the four band members – and their place

within the nation's visible record of 'greatness' or achievement – the National Portrait Gallery.

There is therefore, a constant play in relation to the image and the imaged (and their music) between artifice and authenticity (Frith and Horne, 1987), between autonomous 'high' art and popular or 'low' culture, between a pop group who produce 'tabloid teeny fodder' and an innovative indie music band, between distance and closeness, and between surface and depth. If this hybridity is a feature of the work of portrayal in the age of digital technology then wither aura?

Focusing on the image as art object the analysis suggests both a diminution of authenticity predicated on the existence of an original (hand-made) object, but also a parallel move to re-claim uniqueness. As intimated, the image is multiple and 'mechanical' at every stage. There is no 'unique' or originary object. Further it could be argued that, given its ubiquity on the cover of the CD and in the associated promotional material, the last traces of ritual and cult were removed from the work's reception. It is, in effect all "exhibition" value, and as such its "artistic" function may be only "incidental" (Benjamin, 1999a [1936], p.219). As presaged by Benjamin, digital technologies may disperse or displace the traditional sites of visibility, valuation and validation of the artwork: displacing the institution(s) as the arbiters of taste and value. The ubiquity of the Opie image arguably means that anyone can be an 'expert' on the image. The use of a familiar graphic language also means that viewers do not need specialist knowledge of art history to read or interpret the image. Further, as the quote from Cumming (2001) above, suggests, anyone who bought the CD could be said to 'own' an Opie. The same ubiquity could also create the conditions for shared viewing in place of individual "contemplative immersion". Like architecture, reception of the image may be "consummated by a collectivity in a state of distraction" (Benjamin, 1999a [1936], p.232). Digital technology, as discussed earlier, also opens up the potential for (re) production – any viewer, with the right software, can create their own 'Julian Opie' portrait.

Yet, running counter to this potential democratisation, and for Benjamin, radicalisation, of the image denuded of the exclusionary force of aura, is the operation of the market and of the artist and art institutions to reclaim the grounds of authenticity.

Although commissioned from an 'artist', the Blur image is packaging for generating and reinforcing product recognition. It is driven by the commercial imperative to interpellate a putative consumer. In effect it is not just an example of the commodification of a cultural product (Adorno, 1991), but a cultural product in the service of a commodity. There could, however, be an argument for saying that, like the Pop artists before him, Opie was strategically using the market to subvert it, to reveal, as Foster suggests "how objects and images tend to become serial and simulacral" (2012, p.13). As discussed earlier, the use of the form and content of mass produced goods to create its ostensible opposite – an autonomous art, also suggests the recuperation of 'authenticity' to further rebut commodification. The exhibition of the four portraits making up the Blur image in the context of the gallery, effectively seeking a reverse transition from multiple to unique object, from consumer good to symbolic good, suggests a move to consecrate the work, to return some of its "ritual" authority. These moves, however, raise the question whether playing the market's game subverts or reinforces it.

The play between the multiplicity and authenticity of the Blur image as artwork has its parallels in the imputed 'authenticity' of the imaged. As record cover and promotional material the image is implicated in the constitution of the celebrity of the band and its four members, rendering their physical likenesses ubiquitous. Arguably, the cartoon style underwrites the simulacral and commodified nature of celebrity, reinforcing the absent subjectivity while representing the physical presence. With this vacating of subjectivity may go the potential for intersubjective recognition – the capacity to return the gaze: "the eyes are beady, but go too quickly blank" (Lubbock, 2001). Yet again there could be a counter-argument for saying that here too there is a desire to reclaim "aura". The 'readerly' nature of the image

(and the potential “erotic” investment of fans (Frith and Horne, 1987)) leave open the potential ‘beholder’s share’, the scope for the intervention of “polyphonic voices” to read into the image, to impute a subjectivity, and a capacity for an intersubjective exchange of gazes even as the image seems to deny it. As discussed in relation to the other case studies, this reading is fed by the ‘archive’, the Blur backstory, which also works to constitute their subjectivity.

What the analysis suggests is that digital technologies may create the conditions for a qualitative and quantitative shift in the conditions of production and experience of images, accelerating some of the processes identified by Benjamin. What, however, it may also reveal is that in the face of reports of their demise, ‘aura’ and its twin ‘authenticity’ may be putting up a robust defence. Both experientially and as evaluative criteria for addressing the portrait as art object and representation of an individual, there seems to be a desire to cling on to the something ‘ineffable’, albeit in changed form. This tenacity may be both indicative, as well as independent of, the market-driven need to sustain a discourse of uniqueness and aura to maintain the distribution and consumption of both a commercial ‘product’ (a band/CD) and symbolic good – an art object.

This resistance may suggest if not a withering away of ‘aura’ then a change of shape. In the age of the ubiquitous and multiple ‘selfie’ and 3-d portrait, there may be a call to re-think the work of portrayal. In place of the immutable mobile (Latour, 1990), may be the mutable mobile, the chameleon image distributed to and between the ‘many’, and, in its wake a shift from the distance of ‘aura’ to the fugitive, fleeting, blur.

8. Conclusions

8.1 Overview

Like the 'object', sociology has been both drawn toward the art object, yearning to embrace it within disciplinary boundaries, but also, if not 'repelled' by it, seeking to maintain a safe distance. While recognising 'art' as a social process, discourse and institution, with effects of power, and therefore of disciplinary interest, the concern is that by engaging with the art object 'in itself' (Becker, 2006), it will risk becoming ensnared with a value system the discipline seeks to critique, or be drawn into unwarranted evaluative statements of right-ness or wrong-ness, truth and falsity. When sociology does seek to engage with the art object it tends to be used or seen as an object for illustrating a process outwith itself (e.g. changing conceptualisations of the individual, or embodying or reflecting dominant ideologies). The view is therefore centripetal – from the outside in. In the context of the sociology of art it has, however, been argued that not engaging with the art object is an "abdication" of responsibility and isolates the sub-discipline from the very object of its enquiry (Harrington, 2004; Wolff, 2006, 2008; Zolberg, 1997). From other directions, too, there has been an interest in reinstating the material as an 'actant' in the constitution of the social (Hennion, 2007; Latour, 2005).

This call for a sociological engagement that seeks to take artworks "seriously" (Rose, 2003) suggests a model of analysis that, in Harrington's (2004) words brings together "value distancing" social analysis and "value affirming aesthetic appraisal and value affirming social and political philosophy" (p.210). It is this space of 'between-ness': between the 'social' and the 'aesthetic' (Born, 2010) that the thesis sought to explore. It aimed to do this through the prism of portraiture.

As "...art works intentionally made of living or once living people by artists...and for an audience" (Brilliant, 2002 [1991] p.8), the portrait as image and portraiture as social process are mediated by power relations: in terms of who is and is not portrayed, how and by whom; in the interaction

between the portrait as a material object and as a portrayal of a “living or once living” individual and a (situated) viewer; and in the portrait’s circulation within the field of cultural production. As such it is an art historical genre that offers itself up to a specifically sociological analysis of the operation of power within and through representation, but one which, to date, has been under-explored.

The aim (and challenge) was to attempt to develop an empirical approach that engaged with and explored the relationships between: the material object ‘in itself’; the constitution of the subjectivities represented in and through the image; and the social and historical operation of the field in which the image is constituted (or not) as an ‘art’ object. In the course of doing this it sought not only to bring portraiture to sociological consciousness, but to contribute to a consideration of whether and how it is possible to resolve the “antinomy” between ‘essentialist’ and ‘social constructionist’ approaches to meaning and value (Harrington, 2004; De la Fuente, 2007). The following two sections reflect on what the analysis of the artworks yielded and the implications for the method developed. The implications for the discipline and considerations for further areas of work are discussed in the subsequent section, prior to a final concluding comment.

8.2 Provocations and entanglements: what did looking at the artworks afford?

It is suggested that adopting a mode of analysis that encompasses the portrait as material object, the subject portrayed and the operation of the field has been productive in at least three ways: it enhances an understanding of the processes by which objects become ‘consecrated’ as art and their producers achieve recognition as ‘artists’; it reveals portraiture as a site at which power is exercised, particularly in the constitution of subjectivities; and it contributes to attempts to understand and capture the complex and mediated relationship between the material object (‘in itself’) and the situated viewer. Each of these is examined below.

A process with an object

In very practical terms embedding the (reproduced) images within the text and describing their properties qua images, brought them directly within the sociological gaze. They became more than mute objects at the whim of the buffetings of the field. This is perhaps reflected in the very different feel (and length) of the three case studies and the balance achieved between a focus on and the 'talk' about the images. In part this is due to the approach of following the trail the images' led (albeit within the conceptual frames imposed upon them). But, and by the same token, the 'talk' the objects generate and arguably, their trajectories through the field, are different *because of* the images.

The case studies in chapters 5 and 6 perhaps come nearest to achieving a degree of parity between an exploration of the images as material objects, their affordances, particularly the subjectivities of the portrayers and the portrayed constituted in and through the images, and the positioning of the images and the artists within the field. What they reveal is the complex interweaving of these different dimensions. In the case of the two images by Francesca Woodman (chapter 5), for example, the early death of the artist becomes the prism through which the work of Woodman the artist is evaluated and positioned, and the subjectivity of Woodman the concrete individual is read into and out of the images. This case also serves to demonstrate how the (static) properties of the images can provoke different responses over time – in this case the evaluative commentary in fact shifts from a focus on the artist's biography, to a consideration of the works' formal properties.

In chapter 6, the comparison of two double self-portraits revealed how the material properties of the images (both of which incorporate 'abject' materials) contribute to the constitution of the subjectivities of those portrayed in the images, and the trajectories of the objects through the field. Thus, the self-portrait by the 'established' artists Gilbert and George is evaluated by the field within an art historical frame, the 'abject' materials represented, effectively aestheticized. The artists' imputed non-normative

sexuality read from and in the image draws on the extra-aesthetic archive to which the artists themselves contribute. The black and white, closely cropped image of the twins Dresie and Casie by Roger Ballen, reveals how the sensuous properties of the image, the representation of the subjects' corporeality, generate among situated viewers less of a consideration of the image's position within the canon, than with the micro-politics and ethics of its content.

Of the three cases, the image by Julian Opie of the members of the band Blur is perhaps the most weighed down by explanatory context, the 'outside' within which the image is located, and which seemed to require explication: the digital technology of production, distribution and (re) production; the four men who were the subjects of the image; and the particular format for which it was initially intended (a CD cover). On the one hand it could be argued that this exploration of the social context renders this case the most 'sociological' of the three. But what it does nonetheless suggest is how even when, or perhaps because, the material qualities of the image itself appear to foreclose or resist in-depth analysis, this too shapes the responses of the field, prompting questions, in this case, about the 'authenticity' of the image, the subjects portrayed and the artist.

Focusing on the material object thus helps to further ground and deepen understanding of the operation of the field. In effect it becomes a process with an object: and a process in which power plays out at every stage.

Portraiture as an exercise in power

The specific objects analysed in this thesis were drawn from the art historical genre of portraiture, a genre defined by its focus not just on the representation of the human figure, but that of an (ostensibly) concrete individual. As the above begins to suggest, focusing on the three interweaving strands of the image/portrait, the subject in and of the portrait, and the image's trajectory through the field of cultural production reveals not just the operation of power in the process of consecration of the work and

the positioning and position-taking of the artists (and the objects), but in the constitution of the subjectivities of those portrayed and of the portrayers.

The example of Ballen's image of Casie and Dresie (chapter 6), illustrates how power plays out at the 'micro' level of the portrait's production – as noted in this chapter, the portrait process “replicates patterns of authority that have wider resonance” (Pointon, 2013, p.59). This image provoked a number of questions not just in relation to the power of choice over who is (or is not) portrayed, but, importantly *how* those portrayed are represented – the authoring and authorising of the pose. It raises questions not only about the nature of the 'informed consent' of those who are portrayed, but also the power and ethics of looking – including, as discussed in chapter 4, the gaze of the researcher.

At the 'macro' level each of the case studies reveal in different ways the operation of the 'power' of the field in positioning the works and the artists. The analysis of two images by Francesca Woodman (chapter 5), for example, demonstrates the process of consecration and positioning of the artist unfolding and gathering pace through key actors, networks and institutions within the field – propelled by 'chance' meetings between similarly positioned players. Further, this case shows how the 'circle of belief' (Bourdieu, 2004) once set in motion, gathers its own momentum. By contrast, the example of Opie's image of Blur (chapter 7), an 'original' art work, produced using digital technology and intended for multiple reproduction, illustrates the nature of the 'struggles' by and within the field to establish the 'authenticity' of the work and the artist. What it exposed was the fine and contested line between the consecration of a work as 'art' in the restricted field of production and its designation as 'product' in the field of large-scale production.

But what this case also revealed was the power of institutions not only to evaluate the work as 'art', but also the subjects of the images as sufficiently 'worthy' or 'authentic' for public display in (in this case) a National Portrait Gallery. This opens on to another dimension of power and perhaps one

specific to portraiture; the power of situated 'viewers' to constitute and evaluate the subjectivities of those who are portrayed in the image.

Notwithstanding theoretical arguments for the 'artist' (and the 'subject') as an effect of discourse (Foucault, 1991a [1969]), the analysis of the responses to the portraits (including my own) revealed the constant desire to identify or constitute a self – a 'thereness' (Jones, 2006) – an active creator and an active presence in the work. But, in constituting this presence, this subjectivity, what emerged across the three cases was an evaluative 'flip flop': between an evaluation of the image and an evaluation of the imaged. This first emerged from a review of the commentaries on the work of Francesca Woodman (chapter 5), where, as noted earlier, the evaluation of the images by Woodman the 'artist' is enmeshed with an evaluation of Woodman the biographical individual. But the operation of the 'flip flop' became even more apparent in chapter 6, where the critical evaluation of the image of Dresie and Casie, is almost overwhelmed by the 'evaluation' of the two men. It is their physical presence and the meaning attributed to this, rather than the image's visual properties that are the focus of the critique. Yet, as discussed in the course of the case study, it is the image's material properties, of light and shade, cropping, as well as of surface content, which propel these judgements.

What this case study also drew attention to was the significance of the ('extra-aesthetic') 'voice' of the artist in framing the evaluation of the image as an 'art' object and in constituting the subjectivities of those portrayed. In the case of the self-portrait of Gilbert and George, their own 'talk' about their work and their knowing performance of 'Gilbert and George', operates to structure (if not wholly foreclose) evaluations of the images and of their (imputed) subjectivities. In the case of Woodman's work, the void left by the artist's physical absence opens the space for interpretations including the two-way play of reading the imputed subjectivity from the work as well as the work being read as an expression of an imputed subjectivity. The twins Dresie and Casie, are similarly silent, although the artist Ballen is vocal about himself, his work and this image. In the case of this portrait what was

revealed was how the evaluation of the image's visual properties and the processes of cultural canonisation can work independently and together in constituting the subjectivities of the imaged. Thus 'recognition' of the 'art' and 'artist' may parallel 'misrecognition' of the subject of the art. In effect the analysis of these portraits illustrates the effects of power in and through representation.

Affordances and entanglements: the portraiture's mediation

One of the aims of the thesis was to make a contribution, through the genre of portraiture, to calls for a sociology of art able to engage with the art object 'in itself' as well as the circuit or field in which it is consecrated as an art object, without resorting to essentialism, or assumptions of immanence or transcendence, but also without wholly subsuming the object within social explanation. One way of addressing this, particularly within the sociology of music, has been to consider how the material properties of the object are productively "harnessed" (Darmon, 2015), or mediated, by situated subjects. For commentators such as Born (2005), Darmon (2015), deNora (2004), and Hennion (2003, 2007), the 'collision' or 'intermingling' (Born, 2005) of subject and object co-produces both the perceived properties of the object and the way it is understood and experienced. It is this "inward connection" (Darmon, 2015) to the "matter" of the images by situated viewers (including myself) that the analysis of the case study portraits sought to capture, while also, as Darmon (2015), DeNora (2004) and Born (2005) stress, incorporating an understanding of the wider social, technical, or macro, dynamics.

This was attempted by considering what the images might 'afford', what their material properties (of shape, form, colour and content) might provoke or evoke in a socially and historically located viewer, their experiential or evaluative impact. The aim was to capture the 'something' that emerges from the entanglement of viewer and image, a 'something' that is neither wholly imminent to the object, nor wholly socially determined. In chapter 5 one attempt to capture this generative potential was explored using Barthes' concept of the 'punctum' or disturbance, the 'supplement' over and above the ostensible surface content that an image might generate in a viewer. In

chapter 6, the notion of the 'abject' was used both as a conceptual framing device, but also as a way for trying to understand what the two double portraits might afford, while in chapter 7 aura and authenticity were deployed as a way of capturing what the four portraits of the group Blur might offer up (or foreclose).

Born (2005) argues that theories of mediation, applied to music, effectively "make mutable" dualisms such as the separation of subject from object. In the thesis this mutability is articulated as a sense of 'between-ness': between a focus at the micro level of image and situated viewer and macro social processes; between art historical formal analysis and a critique of the 'good eye'; between sociology and new art history. While illustrative of the tensions it seeks to explore this nonetheless poses some continuing questions about the empirical methods employed both for mediating these tensions and for capturing the object's 'in itself-ness'.

8.3 A reflection on method

One of the aims of the study was to attempt to develop an empirical approach that would keep in play the three dynamics of the visual image; the subject[ivity] portrayed in and through the image; and the object's trajectory through the field of cultural production. In other words an approach that was both centrifugal, from the object out, and centripetal, from the outside in. An iterative approach was adopted, characterised, in chapter 4, as 'taking a line for a walk'. This served to emphasise its exploratory quality, but also to suggest a process of following where the images led.

As suggested above, as a way of opening consideration of generative potential of the images the three case studies were each structured around different conceptual frames: the 'punctum' (Barthes, 2000 [1980]) and the theoretical 'death' of the artist/author' (Foucault, 1991a [1969]) (chapter 5); the 'abject' (Kristeva, 1982) (chapter 6), and aura and authenticity (Benjamin, 1999 [1936])) (chapter 7). It is acknowledged that this structuring already imposes the 'outside' onto and into the images. However, in addition to the pragmatic need to provide a point of entry, the frames emerged in a

‘conversation’ with the images – they reflected what the images evoked or provoked about themselves or what they raised that could be explored in subsequent images.

While, as the discussion in section 8.2 suggests, this approach has been productive at a number of different levels, it does nonetheless leave some questions unresolved. In particular it exposes the difficulties of developing a methodological approach that is sensitive both to the object and the social structure, but also ‘rigorous’ with all that that implies, empirically for reliability and validity.

The exploration in chapter 5, of the experience of the punctum (Barthes, 2000 [1980]), for example, allowed for a reflection on the unintentional, ungeneralizable and highly personal (but situated) (Rose, 2003) ‘pricking’ that a detail within an image may generate. As intimated above this is of value in highlighting that the ‘struggles’ of artworks (Rubio and Silva, 2013) and artists (Bourdieu, 2004) for recognition in the field do not happen in a vacuum but are at least in part stimulated, at source, by an ‘object’. But while, arguably, ‘transparent’ and therefore potentially ‘intersubjectively’ defensible, is such commentary too subjective, too ‘personal’ such that it breaches disciplinary principles? Does it shift the analytical balance too far toward ‘essence’ and subjective, uncritical commentary and away from structure and “value-distanciation” (Harrington, 2004)?

In attempting to grapple with the ‘in-itself-ness’ the thesis has also drawn on art historical commentary. This too poses the risk of uncritically reproducing the views of situated players within the field – rather than capturing the image’s affordances, it captures the affordances, mediated through the prism of the field, and thus becomes part of the ‘game’ of positions and position taking.

Perhaps this underlines the fugitive nature of the ‘in-itselfness’, and the difficulty of capturing ‘something’ that is “co-produced” without reproducing the situated character of the co-production. To paraphrase Prior

(2004), perhaps like aesthetic value, it is “well-nigh impossible to isolate an ‘outside’” from which the in-itself-ness can be ascertained.

Nonetheless, even if the method developed for achieving some sort of parity between the art and the social “in a joint venture of cognition of the world” (Harrington, 2004, p.3) remains ‘unproven’, and the antinomy between ‘essentialist’ and ‘social constructionist’ approaches not wholly resolved, the approach adopted here, and the focus on portraiture in particular has sought to explore the points of mutability and tension. First, by acknowledging and reflecting on the portrait’s capacity to generate socially and historically situated experience and ‘meaning’; and second, by exploring how the material properties of the visual image play out in the processes of evaluation and constitution of both the work as ‘art’ (and its creator as an ‘artist’), and the subject(ivities) in and of the portraits.

8.4 Implications

One of the issues raised is the implication for the discipline. In a sense rather than running against the disciplinary grain, the focus on the ‘object’ places the project within wider disciplinary streams. It can, for example, be situated within the ‘cultural turn’, a move which, arguably, emerged in the UK in the late 1950s with the publication of Richard Hoggart’s (1958) *The Uses of Literacy* and Raymond Williams’ (1958) *Culture and Society*, but gained disciplinary traction with the work of Stuart Hall and the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in the 1960s and 1970s (Bennett et al, 1981; Chaney, 1994; Wolff, 2005). The continued combined concern with the “social and cultural” (Inglis et al, 2007) (however each is defined) within the discipline is evidenced by the launch of the journal *Cultural Sociology* in 2007 and recent publications in the fields of the sociology of culture and cultural sociology (see for example, Back et al, 2012; Stewart, 2014).

The thesis also taps into the discipline’s readiness to productively draw on insights from other disciplines, evident in Born’s (2010) work and in sociological explorations of other ‘sensuous’ domains such as the senses and

emotions (see for example, Turner and Stets, 2005; Vannini, Waskul and Gottschalk, 2012).

But, as discussion of the work of Born (2005), deNora (2004), Darmon (2015) and Hennion (2003, 2007) above suggests, the artwork or art object is also, arguably, (re) claiming a space within sociology in and of itself, and as an active participant in the “co-production” of both the ‘social’ and the ‘art’.¹³⁴

These intellectual streams suggest the salience of the thesis but also the scope for exploring some of the ideas stemming from the analysis. Some of these are less central to the main focus of the study, but emerged in the course of the research. These include, for example, the further development of the sociology of cartoon (see chapter 7), and explorations into ‘iconicity’, that is why and how one painting, such as Manet’s *Olympia* becomes, in a sense, an ‘icon’, not just within the field of art but (and perhaps because of its iconicity in this field), in the ‘field’ of social theorizing (see chapter 3).

More directly, notwithstanding questions relating to the method, there may be an argument for extending the approach to other ‘genres’ to examine the dynamic that emerges, for example, to non-representational art, landscape, work in different media/other ‘arts’. Given the ubiquity of representations of the face there may also be an argument for a more ‘complete’ or systematic ‘sociology of portraiture’. This would seek to fully explore social theorising around the ‘face’ and representations of the ‘face’, together with the technologies and practices of portrayal. This could potentially extend beyond visual art to include, for example, advertising, ‘selfies’, family photography etc. Developing the focus on both structure and object, this would support the further exploration of some of the issues raised here regarding the role of portrayal in the constitution of identity, subjectivity (and inter-subjectivity), perception, status, authenticity, knowledge and power. This would provide an opportunity to explore black portraiture, one of the significant omissions from the current thesis, but also the implications of portraiture in relation to

The setting up in 2015 of a British Sociology Association Sociology of the Arts study group may further attest to the art object’s (re) claim on the sociological field of vision.

class and gender as well as sexuality and, in a reflection back to the thesis' origins, issues of stigma.

8.5 Concluding comment

"There is no doubt that the sociologist of art much be competent to study and to understand both social structures and processes and the meaning of artistic phenomena. That such a task is difficult does not mean that it cannot or should not be undertaken." (Bird, 1979, p.35)

As Bird, suggests, or perhaps forewarns, trying to combine approaches that address both social structure and "the meaning of artistic phenomena" has proven difficult: developing a method that keeps both within the field of vision, keeping different 'discourses' in play, drawing on a broad range of different types of material, finding a way of talking about images in a way that can be shared and, also, meaningful. Nonetheless, what the thesis suggests is the mutual productivity of an approach that does work the space of between-ness. The analysis of the artworks yielded valuable insights not only in to the operation of the 'field', but also added to an understanding of the constitutive role of representation. Similarly, an understanding of the operation of the field provided a frame for understanding evaluative responses to the art objects. Without paying attention to the material object the narrative is incomplete and the opportunities for mutual learning and understanding lost. In other words, even if some issues remain unresolved there is a value to, and a need for sociology and the artwork to look at each other, face to face.

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